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THE

MATRIMONIAL VANITY FAIR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"WHITEFRIARS," "THE CITY BANKER,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
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THE MATRIMONIAL VANITY FAIR.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE AT THIRTY-FOUR AND FORTY-FIVE.

It might, in truth, have puzzled much wiser people than these two ladies of the Clanbrassey descent to account for the circumstances which were the subject of their not too friendly consideration and analysis. It puzzles the present writer, for example, most particularly, whose office it is to make everything clear and probable, even in describing what is now proverbially admitted to be so much stranger than the inventions of fiction in her most fantastic moods.

It is not difficult, of course, to understand

and explain the movements of human sympathy in the great business of falling in love, in ordinary cases when the young, the beautiful, the high-spirited—the well-dressed, the wealthy merely even, for likes run to likes—are caught in one another's fascinations. But the explanation becomes difficult when little or nothing of all this appears on the record; and, on the contrary, the strongest powers of attraction seem to evolve from circumstances of repulse in the relative polarities of the parties.

To be sure, Rosanna Clanbrassey's sudden captivation has been partly accounted for previously. The excited and yet hungered imagination of the unhappy woman—which, like other misdirected appetites, had turned to prey on garbage—no sooner discerned its native food than the wing was spread, and the beak strained, soaring upward in pursuit. There were good probabilities in the case, and an impassioned, though long starved and mortified, fancy supplied all that was needful with Miss Clanbrassey in decking out the chieftain of Pendragon Mohr with the noblest attributes of chivalric manhood

and superiority of every kind. Rosanna had intellect to appreciate his, and it turned, with a new-born capability of living absorption and increment, from the barren leaves of books, to the vivifying warmth and stir of a powerful and original mind in spheres of active movement and research. All her wasted existence hitherto seemed to be restored to her in this sudden discovery of a use and application for those treasured stores of knowledge and information which had been to her hitherto a mere hortus siccus, collected with infinite toil only to mock the investigator with colourless, scentless skeletons of form, and fragrance, and beauty. Truly, for the first time in her life, perhaps, since her destinies had become so disastrously entangled by the counteraction of natural and artificial impulses, set in formidable action in so powerful a framework of passion and intellect, Rosanna Clanbrassey rejoiced that her uncle had taken so much pains to render her unfit to be an ordinary woman, but fit to be the companion and fellow-reasoner of a man of the highest range of understanding and acquirement, like Tredegar Pendragon, Esq., M.P.

A passion so little physical in its origin could well bear to overlook the absence of the charms of youth and freshness in the still noble and towering person of that descendant of princes and chiefs of men. And, though Rosanna was not in reality herself old in years—in spite of the reflections of her sisters, who always forgot how much younger she was than themselves—but in fatigue and disappointment of heart, and exhaustion of spirits, over labours and pursuits that yielded no joy to her woman's heart or nature—the matured age of Mr. Pendragon, and consequent experience of the world and its usages which marked all he said, if not all he did, seemed only to present additional claims to her admiration and homage.

But it is comparatively easy to account for a woman's fascination in most cases, especially a secluded and neglected one like Rosanna Clanbrassey, in all that appertained to the emotions now awakened in her heart, when for the first time, it seemed to her, she stirred reciprocal feelings in the breast of a high-born gentleman, and equal in all respects. Too late, indeed ! too late. But that direful conviction itself acted as

the spell of the forbidden and dangerous always has acted upon the human race since Eve felt the mysterious attractions of the fruit which brought Sin and Death into the world; heightened —perhaps caused—by its prohibition!

But that the fastidious, memory-devoted Tredegar Pendragon should almost as suddenly reciprocate that profound interest—that sentiment of attraction and tender dedication which had made a new woman of Rosanna Clanbrassey —almost visibly transfigured her coarser lineaments even to the eye?

It is strange, but it is true!

Had Rosanna Clanbrassey been a woman of the finest imaginable feminine attributes; had her face and figure boasted an exquisitely delicate feminine character; her mind the cowering feminine weakness, submission, and all-trustingness of the lovely woman who had been the angel of Mr. Pendragon's youth, and was still the glorified vision overhanging all his past; it is probable he would have turned away, with the heart's natural impatience and weariness of the repetition of its experience, from the fascinations of the new charmer. He had turned away thus

from the fairest mocking representations of his departed seraph in the flesh, and preserved in preference a constancy to her marble similacrum on a tomb. To love for the second time, with any revivication of primal powers, in truth, you must start afresh by loving the reverse of what you have already exhausted one range of sympathies and sensibilities upon. And so, perchance, it happened that, as soon as he began to look upon her in any feminine light at all, Mr. Pendragon's feelings and interest were more aroused and riveted by the strong-minded, large-limbed, brooding, learned, mysterious, ugly, sallow woman that offered herself to his notice and regards, than they could have been by the most finished and matchless Psyche creation might present him in exchange for the one he had lost.

Only a contrast so complete could have struck with so much force on the monotony of Mr. Pendragon's regrets, and reversed the general action of his mind towards female pretendants to notice in it. Moreover, there was so strange a mixture of rough-and-ready gravitation of emotions towards himself in the strong woman's

exhibitions, restrained by such visible counter-active energies of an unknown nature, that Mr. Pendragon was at once flattered and startled into unusual attention by the phenomena. There was nothing of womanish contrivance or coquetry, he could perceive very clearly, in these strangely-varying moods of the masculine mind and sternly-disciplined heart thus exposed to his analysis. And he felt himself engaged in the study by all the tormenting and yet fascinating attraction of a problem or rebus, whose solution was, besides, full of a flattering promise and interest to himself personally.

To these motives of curiosity and philosophical research may be added as much of the more worldly and vanity-tangled feelings ascribed to him by the Countess and her sister in their conversation, as could form part in the composition of a gentleman of high integrity and those stately principles of honour that governed Mr. Pendragon in all the relations of life. No doubt he had grown to feel excessively anxious as to the realities of the position in which himself and his property were now involved, and would have been happy to find some anchorage

in his doubts and perplexities. To balance the effects of the tragedy of the returned convict, he certainly felt very desirous to make the acquaintance of persons whose connexion with those to whom he had trusted his all, and high and honourable position in society, seemed to assure him that he was not going to be miserably taken in.

This, at all events, was the reason Mr. Pendragon assigned to himself for accepting, and continuing to lay stress upon, Miss Clanbrassey's invitation to Featherstone Haugh, at a time when his own immediate business in Liverpool seemed brought to a satisfactory pause. The shares of the mining company formed on his property had gone up at once to a handsome premium on the Liverpool Exchange, and nothing seemed required but the extension of the works already commenced on a grand scale, and some signs of the good fortune expected to ensue, to establish the whole speculation as a great success.

Under these circumstances Miss Clanbrassey's announcement, at the close of her visit to Liverpool, that she was to return home on the follow-

ing day, and expression of her hope that Mr. Pendragon would come on the next after that, to allow her the pleasure of introducing two enthusiasts of geological science to each other, was received by that gentleman as a covert form of expressing her wish to go before to make things more comfortable for his reception. He bowed in a gratified manner in consequence; and he was only taken down a few pegs when Madame de la Mazurka exclaimed, "Capital, Rosanna! Mr. Pendragon will, I am sure, not object to a seat in the carriage my sister has kindly placed at my disposal, and taking care of me on a visit to my uncle also; and we may as well make an appointment together." What could he say but that he should have much pleasure in officiating as Madame the Countess's escort on the occasion? Rosanna noticed, however, with grim satisfaction, that he did not seem much pleased with the prospect of the tête-à-tête.

When the "following day" came, and Miss Clanbrassey took her departure from Liverpool Palace, it was with the greatest pleasure also that she found Mr. Pendragon made a special

call to pay his farewell compliments. And there was an expression of regret in his countenance, mingled with so much of earnest interest, that the poor haggard "Solomon in petticoats" enjoyed all the luxurious meditation of a Juliet of sixteen for hours after they had separated, until indeed she found herself in sight of Featherstone Haugh Hall. And then of a sudden a weight as of a whole atmosphere fell upon her, and she seemed like an overworked steed backing, after a few insufficient moments of repose, into the dreary shafts again.

CHAPTER II.

FEATHERSTONE HAUGH.

FEATHERSTONE HAUGH village was not in itself a very cheerful-looking place, or calculated to diminish the effects of any painful associations by its natural charms. It was situated upon the edge of an extensive, almost black-hued sea-moss, which descended to the shores of the Mersey, in alternate wastes of reedy rock and turf and pools of saline putrescency. The village consisted of about thirty homesteads; with the exception of the parsonage and the manor-house, all of very poor and lowly-looking cottages, built of cobblestones cemented together by mud, and thatched with black pease straw. These dwellings were scattered in various ins and outs of wretchedly unproductive and uncultivated gar-

dens and orchards, around what was by courtesy denominated the Haugh Green. This was, however, rather a continuation of the dark and marshy moss below, diversified by patches of short, stunted furze, coarse grass, and a whole wilderness of wormwood, as an undergrowth. The very geese that fed upon the common—it was so wide an unenclosure that it might rather be called one—were reported in the Liverpool market to partake of the bitterness of this species of natural provision, which they were compelled by starvation to feed upon. So, at least, the malicious wits of the market would have it. Some epicures professed to like them the better on that account, certainly; but "bitter as a Haugh goose" was a Liverpool market proverb.

The redeeming points of the scenery lay inland, where, indeed, as soon as the limits of the extensive waste were passed, enclosures and fields began, and lines of villas surrounded by gardens and trees, and glimpses of woodland and carefully-cultured country, speedily rejoiced the eye, and announced the neighbourhood of a great and opulent city. Distant windmills whirled their great arms, and proclaimed the

pleasing fact that barrenness and desolation dwelt not throughout the land, as might have been augured from the immediate aspect of things in Featherstone, since there was occupation for these engines of plenty, though remote.

The crowing of cocks, the cackling of geese, and the drowsy murmur of the "Moss Beck" —a stream which traversed the village, yellow and brightly pure as amber, over a narrow rocky bed, till it lost itself, by a score of broken channels, like the sandy mouths of the Rhine, in the sea—were almost the only sounds you ever heard in the Featherstone Haugh on week-days. Occasionally, perhaps, the shrill voice of a woman calling to some misdemeaning child—probably paddling too rashly in the "Beck"—or the slow, apathetic interchange of greeting between two wearied labourers trudging home, might interrupt the stillness. Or, perhaps, I should say, render it, by the contrast, more apparent. It was quite an agricultural village, indeed, the marsh appearing to its inhabitants an insuperable obstacle to their attempting anything industrial on the broad waves of the estuary so close at hand. Not to mention that

every mile of that watery extent was as carefully mapped and owned, with all imaginable fishing and manorial rights and wrongs, as the barren shore itself.

On Sundays there were perhaps some signs of animated existence in the ringing of the bells to church. So the ancient old stone barn with a steeple, that stood in its little place of tombstones, and swelling green mounds, and immemorial yew trees, at the head of the village, had the face to rate itself. But even these bells could not be prevailed upon—or else were seldom asked—to put anything cheerful or life-like in their summons. Strangers almost always inquired whom the bells were tolling for? On the whole, therefore, the aversion of the vagabond-blooded, semi-Irish Clanbrasseys for their uncle's place of dignified residence, in their youth—with the exception, it was supposed, of the more teachable and congenially gloomy Rosanna—was pretty well accounted for.

The ancient manor-house itself partook of all these general characteristics of seclusion and melancholy in no slight degree. It is true it was paled in with a considerable park, which

had been diligently redeemed from the waste, and was pretty well wooded, besides being of a much more diversified and broken ground. But approaching it by its avenue from the village, it seemed situated in the depths of a hollow, only opening on one side to a range of old-fashioned, gloomy garden enclosures and terraces, relapsing, after a descent, into the dreary wastes of the moss, which were in their turn bounded throughout by the sands, or swelling tides of the Mersey.

The Hall was like most of the mansions of its era—three centuries ago—a modernized remains of a fortified building, consisting of a low, central tower, and an enclosure of defensible courts, surrounded by a battlemented wall and moat. The moat had been drained, the drawbridge removed, the walls roofed-in up to the "donjon or keep," and pierced with long, formal, lozenge-glazed windows, as chambers adapted to more modern uses, when those of military strength ceased to be of importance. The tower and a good portion of the walls were hung with ivy and creepers, but wherever they appeared presented a grey and crumbling aspect

not altogether reassuring to an arriving guest. The whole place being, besides, shut in by masses of lofty and extremely ancient trees, of which Mr. Featherstone could not fell a single trunk, even if he had been desirous, Featherstone Haugh Hall, it must be allowed, presented a sufficiently weird and shadowy aspect to allow the shapings of some dismal and unhappy internal romance to figure itself readily to the vision of a person whose imaginative tendencies might run that way, or whose personal experience might put him on the "Stygian track" in contemplation.

Of latter years, too, the residence and all about it had fallen into very marked neglect and desuetude. The entail, which deprived Mr. Featherstone of all power over its disposal as an inheritance, indisposed him to any outlay and expenses the fruits of which were to be reaped by a stranger. He desired rather to save all he could. The seclusion he delighted in, or at least would not be troubled to dissipate, and the smallness of the family his finally shrank into, with a single favourite niece for a companion, rendered much attendance unnecessary. By far the greater portion of the house was therefore quite unin-

habited. Nobody set foot in the tower from year's end to year's end, and what were traditionally known as the state chambers were rarely even opened to the light of day, though they contained many curious old pictures and old furniture, which would have been the better for an occasional dusting. The household consisted of only two ancient maid-servants and one serving-man, who seldom donned his livery, and was now growing so old that the propriety of allowing him a boy to aid him in the rougher work was seriously canvassed by Mr. Featherstone and his niece. But had been so strenuously remonstrated against by the Scotch bailiff, as a waste of better-devoted wages, that nothing had as yet been done in the matter.

In truth, this Scotch bailiff had established, in the course of the two years he had now resided at Featherstone Haugh, a singularly complete and scarcely accountable influence over the entire property and its owner.

To be sure, Abednego Blackmore was speedily ascertained to be worthy of all the high praises which had recommended him to Mr. Featherstone's employment, from that of a

neighbouring gentleman who had found farming pursuits too expensive for an income which had also to be shared with London ballet-dancers and Newmarket blacklegs. So at least the discharged bailiff, who had cause to speak his best of so kind and unreckoning a master, was compelled to declare to his new proprietor was the occasion of his leaving. Nothing of this kind was to be apprehended at Featherstone, and the skilful agriculturist—such he really was—had no great difficulty in making his management shine in contrast to that of his predecessors, in all the details of a most indulgently neglected property and tenantry.

But it was not only in modern and improved styles of cultivation, routine of crops, drainage, &c., introduced by this capable official to the unwilling executive powers of the laggard villagers of Featherstone Haugh, (which, for that matter, might have been styled Sleepy Hollow), that Abednego Blackmore made a new era felt and detested there. He raised the values of the properties he came in contact with by infusing, as much as in him lay, his own spirit of grasping rapacity and hardness of economical calcu-

lation into their proprietors. Rents were looked into and stretched to their utmost modern capabilities—and in good truth, in the case of the Featherstone property, they admitted fairly enough of a wide expansion, since the squires of the Haugh had scarcely increased their revenues since Liverpool first began to boast a steeple. He narrowed or abolished numerous ancient privileges of the tenantry, being perfectly familiar with modern landlord-made laws restraining them. He levied unknown new dues and exactions, and laboured at the reduction or removal of the numbers of persons employed or figuring as paupers on the land, with a zeal that did the highest credit to the maxims of "Political Economy," of which he was an ardent disciple. Not so much, indeed, to the credit of his humanity, perhaps,—but Abednego Blackmore was perfectly indifferent on that point.

He had been very successful, in particular, in influencing Miss Clanbrassey in the adoption of his views in these ways, and Miss Clanbrassey was now virtually the disposer and controller of all that was done upon her uncle's property. Mr. Featherstone was growing old, and had

always had a bookish and refined love of ease and quiet, which gained upon him. He had lost the habit of mingling much and familiarly among his dependents and neighbours; he heard with his niece's ears, and saw with her eyes. And he could reasonably apologize to himself for the surrender of his powers and duties into her hands, by remembering that as Rosanna's future provision must depend altogether upon what could be laid up from the estate during his lifetime, the regulation of its affairs had become more her business than his own.

Abednego's harsh and rapacious counsels were, moreover, recommended to his superiors by the carneying and obsequious manner in which he introduced them for acceptance, in conjunction with the pitiless logic of expediency and right by which he always laboured to make his most opposed doings of the sort seem results of no other motives or sentiments. He was a man of some education, though altogether self-bestowed—a circumstance of which he had seemed proud on his first arrival at Featherstone, when he made no secret to the haughty country gentleman that he was sprung from a

race of poverty-stricken cottars in one of the remotest and most inclement counties of Scotland, and had acquired all his knowledge in the science of agriculture in a long, severe apprenticeship to a native soil, which, under the exertions and expenditure of its noble owner, had been converted from barren heath and mountain into fruitful corn and grass land, sheltered under growing woods, with its original value multiplied a hundredfold.

In the "booing" and insinuating styles of "creeping up a sleeve," indeed, Sir Pertinax Macsycophant himself could not have surpassed the slimy crawlings of Abednego Blackmore towards the attainment of his ends. But he was endowed with another quality also greatly conducive to success in a man's own objects. He was attached to his opinions on all subjects —not alone agricultural—with an inconceivable obstinacy and stubbornness, and had an unbounded belief in his abilities and resolution to bring anything he undertook to pass. His own elevation in the world—above all, the acquirement of wealth—were to be reckoned undoubtedly among the secret imaginings of the

heart of this man, which, coupled with unscrupulousness as to means, iron nerves, habits of inflexible secrecy and caution in all that concerned himself, rendered him, though he kept the most exact and carefully-ruled books and ledgers of accounts in the world, rather a dangerous sort of a steward and general manager, I should say.

It was possibly these latter qualities of weddedness to his own opinions—returning to them always, whatever windings round the whole field he might seem to take—which, after a time, had diminished the great favour and adhesion Miss Clanbrassey was remarked by every one for a long period to have exhibited towards the excellent servant whose abilities she had secured in her interests, and who had such judicious arts of recommending their relentless carrying out to herself. Or perhaps she grew rather to disrelish certain encroachments to his own advantage, and a species of copartnery he established in the management of the extensive dependencies Mr. Featherstone kept in his own hands, and which the Scotch bailiff was originally engaged to put in order and superintend. At all events, some

considerable time before Rosanna's late visit to Liverpool, she had been observed to change not a little in her demeanour towards, and harmonious action with, the domineering agent. The servants and tenants at the house and on the Home Farm, as it was called, had begun to remark, with much satisfaction to each other, that their "young lady"—as they persisted in styling her—seemed no longer disposed to such constant and intimate association in the objects and proceedings of the Scotch bailiff as had been long the case previously. She appeared, in fact, rather to shun his society and to discourage his plans of extending his dominion and rapacities. Occasions even seemed to arise of strong difference of opinion between them, which all the blandishing cajolery of Blackmore's habitual manner did not prevent, some thought, from running at times even into altercation and direct concussion. Intervals followed as of a sullen species of resentment against ill-usage and ignorant overswaying on the part of the opinionative bailiff—of scarcely disguised contempt, impatience, and almost, one might say, revolt and defiance against an usurpation that galled her,

on the part of the lady of Featherstone Hall. Lengthened periods of repulse and alienation evidently took place between the parties, so long protracted at times that good hopes were entertained of the removal of the unpopular overlooker by his employeress's own fiat. But mutual interests probably facilitated reconciliations between the agricultural lady and her bailiff, for these hopes had hitherto been always signally baffled when they seemed approaching fruition nighest.

Perhaps it was a little remarkable that, on both sides, these discussions and differences were kept carefully concealed from the Squire, who had no great liking for the man himself, and would, it is very possible, have been pleased with an opportunity, presented by any complaint on his niece's part, to be rid of him. Mr. Featherstone's belief in the sustained confidence and patronage of his niece towards her efficient agent was, in fact, the only thing that kept him in decent terms of satisfaction with Blackmore himself. The increase of the rent-roll was not much his concern, and he could not shut his ears altogether to the murmurs and afflictions of

his once happy and contented tenantry and dependents. But no doubt Miss Clanbrassey had grown accustomed to the blarneying flatteries and deference in forms of the hard-headed and hard-hearted agriculturist—was puzzled how to supply his place, or found him too thoroughly mixed up in the entire condition of her affairs and her uncle's property, to proceed to any summary action in freeing herself from what it is, however, not unlikely she began to look upon as the establishment of an irksome and encroaching tyranny of control, in the shape of advice.

In good truth, if the characteristics of both the personages had not been so utterly opposed to the idea, or if so improbable a scandal could have entered the heads of the feudal-bred villagers of Featherstone, something of the vagaries of the tender passion—its changeful moods of imperious demand and repulse, of disgust and craving, likely to arise between such an ill-matched pair—might have entered even their simple minds. We have seen how it crossed the speculations of the intriguing Frenchified Countess de la Mazurka and her sister.

But independently of a thousand other considerations, even their malice and corruption of conjecture could scarcely have survived the consideration of the total personal unfittedness of the supposed hero of a pastoral love romance for the post. There could hardly, besides, have been greater contrasts in personal characteristics than the Scotch Corydon and his fancied Chlöe presented. Rosanna Clanbrassey was, we know, of most unusual height and development in the framework for a woman. Bailiff Blackmore scarcely reached the middle standard in stature, and was of almost ridiculously mean and shrunken lower proportions in his limbs. These effects were all, no doubt, heightened by a way of stooping at the neck, which Abednego had contracted rather from the cringing habits of his mind than any natural malformation. Though, to be sure, he had a head large out of all proportion to his frame, and almost perfectly round in the shape—as could be plainly discerned by its nearly complete baldness, saving some tufts of colourless sandy hair which decorated it at scattered points. But the features of the face were quite as unusually small and mean to form the

centre of such a perimeter; the mouth was thin and strongly compressed, as if to conceal what really seemed like a dentist's box of double-set, wolf-like teeth, when it was allowed any swing of display; the eyes were puckered up, lurking, and insidiously watchful in no ordinary degree; otherwise destitute of expression; and no one could say of what colour they were, if any. Add to all this very high cheek-bones, a bloodless, but strongly, one might almost say, plaided complexion, from its weather-beaten diversities of hue, and we have a personage at once in a high degree plebeian, ungainly, and sinister, and not assuredly by any means of the kind to make a proud and well-born gentlewoman forget what was due to herself and her dearest ties and interests by accepting a levelling to. But to complete the picture, it must be said that Abednego Blackmore was not by any means a young man—probably nearer fifty than forty—that he had an habitual asthmatic cough, and that his customary dress was as ill-becoming as his figure. He almost invariably wore a faded green gamekeeper-looking coat, with large metal buttons; corduroy shorts, with high gaiters but-

toned up to the knees; a Scotch cap, and plaid necktie sufficiently greasy and dirty. And when he donned his Sunday, or market-day suit of ill-cut black broadcloth and chimney hat, he looked less a gentleman than ever.

No: it was not surely in all the power of association—in all the insanity of solitude, and delirious workings of the Celtic blood Rosanna Clanbrassey inherited—to have brought about so strange a result as a passion between two creatures whose instincts and position seemed to place them at opposite poles of existence and creation! Could any yet subtler and more powerful fiend have introduced his agency into the work?

We should hope not; and the most suspicious scrutiny could have discovered little to gratify its queries in the first meeting that took place between the unhappy-visaged Rosanna Clanbrassey and the confidential manager, on her return to Featherstone Hall.

True it is, that when Miss Clanbrassey's hired vehicle from Liverpool reached the entrance to the hall grounds—her uncle's carriage had long since rotted off its wheels in the coach-

house—Mr. Blackmore came out the first to open the seldom-used entrance, and to welcome the mistress of the establishment home. But he had a perfect right to be there, inasmuch as he resided close at hand.

One of Mr. Featherstone's principal farms—the Home Farm, as it was called—being in his own hands, he employed five or six men-servants, as farm labourers, carters, etc., who resided in an old building which had once been a fortified gateway from the moat, and was consequently not very far from the house. Here also were the principal outbuildings in use for the establishment—a farmyard, barns, cow-houses—what-not—useful in the produce and storing of agricultural wealth. And here the bailiff himself resided, in two small rooms over the gateway, which he never suffered anyone to enter—where he cooked his own frugal meals, read his Bible, chaunted, or, rather, sonorously repeated his psalms on Sunday; and on week-days occupied his little leisure in a great variety of small personal economics, and the study of the bucolic sciences, to which he apparently devoted the master energies of his mind.

The Scotch Malvolio—if such he was—had therefore a perfect right to be where he was found, and even upon the duty he had assigned himself. For he was enabled to explain that Mistress Ullathorne, the under-bailiff's wife, who kept the lodge—if so it might be styled—was laid up with the "rheumatics," and her daughter busy at some "sluttery" in her place. But he had scarcely a right to wear such a sullen and settled scowl on his mean, yet, as it now appeared, evilly-expressive features, and which seemed to pucker the short nose and sinister eyes together, even while giving utterance to a most obsequiously respectful form of welcome home to the mistress of the establishment.

"Ye're r*ight* welcome, Miss Featherstone! r*ight* welcome back to the place!" he said, in his strong Scotch accent, giving a guttural aspiration to the adverb, and such being the name by which he invariably addressed Miss Clanbrassey. "It has not seemed a bit like the oon sel' of it ever syne ye took yer ways hence; and the maister will come back to his temper again, I trust and pray, when he sees ye're re-

turned to him safe and sound out of the snares set for us a' in a sinfu' world; for he seems to have made up his mind some accident would be sure to happen ye, little accustomed as ye are to be away on your own management in a big, rattling, mad-brained toon like Liverpool. But ye're no looking sae weel, Miss, and sorry am I to mak' the remark, as ye gave us all to understan' ye were feeling yoursel' in the change of air! Ye're looking a thousand times waur, and paler, and feverish-like, than ye left us; and I'm sure that was sad enough, o' all conscience!"

"I am a great deal better—I was a great deal better—exactly as I wrote my uncle word I was, and am! Perhaps the journey has a little tired me to-day, as we were late up at a farewell party at my sister's last night," replied Miss Clanbrassey, who looked certainly extremely annoyed at the scrutiny to which she felt herself subjected from those colourless, yet fixed and hankeringly suspicious orbs of vision. "How is my uncle? Is he quite well?"

"As well as a man of his age—and better—can be expected to be, that goes about fashing

himself, and fashing everybody about him, finding fault with a' things that's said, done, or thought in a parish bounds!" replied the bailiff in tones of exasperation, and, as it were, defiance and revolt, that struck Rosanna.

She looked at him for a moment with all the deep lines of her own visage deepening in shadow, while its projecting features became of an almost deadly sallowness, as if the circulation dived down to her heart with some internal qualm. Then she averted her eyes with a sort of shudder of pain and vexation from the plebeian figure before her, in contrast, probably, with those other nobly intellectual, chieftain-like attributes haunting her memory.

"Where is my uncle, Mr. Blackmore?" she inquired after a very slight pause, but during which the postboy on the single horse that drew the hired vehicle she came by, looked back in wonderment for orders, looked still more wonderingly forward for none. Nor had the bailiff, though apparently busied at it, succeeded as yet in unfastening the crazy-looking iron gate that admitted to the premises.

"Where is the Squire, madam? Forsooth, I could hardly mak' ye out his latitude and longitude to a mile or a dozen, one moment by the other this week past. He's been here, there, and everywhere, examining into everything as sharp as a supervisor after a smuggled cargo, almost every hour of the time ye've been awa,' as if he was expecting to find wonders under a pot-lid, and the Forty Thieves in every butter-firkin! It's no great compliment to an honest servant, I'm thinking, madam! not to seem fit to be trusted with the keys of a cornbin the instant your leddyship's back was turned from the inspection! And Mr. Featherstone goes about listening to all the old women's lies and inventions he can hear in every smoky ingle-corner! At this blessed striking, whatever's the hour, he's down, I know, in the Far Field, with all his dogs lolling about in their laziness, listening to old Bill Burton's—lazy Bill Burton's—growling about his contract job to keep the Green Road hedges in repair to the first Moss Dyke, which he had neglected for years. And ten to one the Squire will give him his leave to neglect it on as much as

he may please to the future—till there's neither hedge nor dyke remaining to preserve!"

"If my uncle is in the Far Field, there is no great hurry for me to make for the house. And, besides, the avenue is in such a rough, overgrown state at present, perhaps this young man, who don't know the ins and outs of the place, might overturn his vehicle. I'll get out here at once, I think, Mr. Blackmore, and the postboy can put up his horse for an hour or two on a good corn-feed, and come up to the house himself for refreshment with my trunk and bandbox. Ullathorn will help when he comes in to his tea, and it is just that now," Miss Clanbrassey said, resuming a sort of sternness and resolution in her tones that struck the bailiff rather ominously, and looking steadily from him at her watch as she spoke. But she looked at him with an asperity and indignation in her deeply-sunk and mostly wearied and passionless eyes, that made him start, as she added, "And you can follow on with me, and you can tell me all the news as we go. How's Mopsy, now?"

"Mopsy's sold; she fetched just her hide and

horns, and I didn't envy the man that got her his bargain!" returned the bailiff, in a continued dogged, sullen, and defiant manner. "And that is another of the *right* things done about the place that's put the Squire's bear growling, and sets him biting at people like a seal at a stick!"

"I don't wonder then, Blackmore — Mr. Blackmore! I told you my uncle would not hear of your selling the cow in her lamed condition. If you will do such obstinate, rebellious things against your employer's wishes, you must take—you must take the natural consequences, man! Open me the door of the phaëton, will you? for it is quite plain you will not get that gate undone between now and Christmas!"

"Shall I help you, old gentleman?" said the postboy, nimbly springing from his saddle, and advancing for the purpose.

Harmful, though well-meant and inoffensive words on the lad's part! They produced their effect certainly on Miss Clanbrassey, and not much less so, though in a different way, on the person more immediately addressed.

"No, ye shannot! ye shannot! ye young

town-monkey, ye! Who gave you leave to be so familiar with me, and call me 'old gentleman?'" returned Blackmore, quite ferociously, and looking as if he meant to strike the lad if he approached. The postboy paused, and looked in a puzzled, smiling manner at his fare—

"I think you are all crazy to-day about the place! Must I open it myself?" said Rosanna Clanbrassey, violently flinging open the door of her vehicle, in effect, and striding to the ground. "And now shall I do your work there, too, Blackmore,—or do you mean to be fumbling on all day at those bars?"

"Your pardon, my leddy. I did na' notish the lodge-man had twisted it with wire; the Squire's horse always goes out by the back way," replied the bailiff, seeming to awaken to the consciousness that he was indulging in an unseemly altercation with his mistress. "There now, you ear-to-ear, grinning young jackal, the stable for you is on that side o' th' yard, and you will find plenty of good wholesome straw to rub your beast down and diet her on afterwards."

"No, my man; lead your horse on the other side; there's better accommodation and feeding there; and I am the person, I trust, who has the best right in this place to tell you where to go, excepting the master himself. And now, Mr. Blackmore, come along with me, and tell me all the news, to the house."

Miss Cranbrassey marched her towering person past the figure of the bailiff, which it decidedly overpowered, and who had, besides, sunk now into his habitual cringing attitude, as if cowed by the spirit displayed against his own carping insolence of ill-humour and reluctant service. Then turning with undissembled exasperation from the grinning postboy, who enjoyed the "old gentleman's" take-down mightily, he gave a further not very attractive asthmatic cough, and followed on his mistress's steps with a good deal of the mortified submission of a beaten cur.

Miss Clanbrassey meanwhile appeared to take no further notice of the annoying circumstances of her arrival, but began almost immediately, in the hearing of the postboy, to observe upon the broken and dangerous condition of the ride to the Hall.

"We must put on men at once—as many as we can get from the Haugh after work-hours—to put things in some decent order here. This is quite shocking as the approach to a gentleman's house, and I wonder I never noticed it before!"

"It's the fine places and gravel walks you have just come from makes ours look so shabby. Does your leddyship expect visitors?" inquired Mr. Blackmore, with evident surprise and anxiety. "Grand visitors, I suppose, from the great town?"

"The Countess de la Mazurka, my sister, is coming to see her uncle—she has not seen him for years," said Miss Clanbrassey, rather hastening her steps to be freed from the intrusive familiarity with which the bailiff followed so closely on them, as he did.

"The *Countess* de la Mazurka!—your sister!—the *Countess!* Na wonder ye've come back too proud to own auld acquaintances of the poorer sort, without handles to their names!" the bailiff exclaimed, with a somewhat sneering emphasis on the title in question.

"What do you mean, Mr. Blackmore, by

dwelling with a sort of insolent emphasis on my sister's designation, and—and following me up so closely? Have I not always told you I would not suffer the least undue familiarity of the kind?" Miss Clanbrassey now exclaimed, turning sharply and fiercely round, and giving a flashing glance of scorn and hatred from her large, hawk-grey eyes, at the shabby figure on her heels.

"Well, no, Miss Featherstone. I meant no offence against your sister, the Countess, or any other foreigner of the sort. Only I could not but wonder you should be the means yersel', and seem to intend to make quite a gala of it, to bring any of the Clanbrassey people about your uncle again!"

"Oh, the Countess will do no harm; she was never a favourite with my uncle—never can be! I am not afraid of her! My ruin will not come from that direction! But, I must say, I am surprised, Mr. Blackmore, at the airs of interference you take upon you in all my family matters, as well as the management of the estate! I am growing weary of it all, as well as my uncle! And what did you mean by

writing that extraordinary letter of yours to me at the post-office in Liverpool? Had I not expressly told you I would never receive any such from you? and only gave you the reference there, in case there was any matter of private business you might wish to communicate with me upon? Not such stuff as you dared to write to me!"

Miss Clanbrassey, it was evident to Bailiff Blackmore, was rather striving to pick an occasion for quarrel, than avoiding one now; and he was considerably taken aback with the conviction. He replied evidently with some disorder and surprise, but still with a degree of asperity, like a man who felt his rights assailed.

"Dared to write to you, Miss Featherstone! Well! I was not much afraid you would make known to people what I wrote to you—business or otherwise! And had I not a right to wonder why you so suddenly changed the whole plan of operations, and refused to proceed to Scotland —to Scarboro', if you like to ca' it better, and think it necessary to keep up that fable between ourselves!—where we could have been as easily married as look at one another, and no one ever

have been a bit the wiser! Don't be afraid, and glower round so; nobody can possibly hear anything we say here!"

Miss Clanbrassey, nevertheless, looked around her on all sides with extreme anxiety and vexation manifest in her whole appearance. But things really seemed safe enough. They had reached a winding in the ancient avenue to Featherstone Hall, which was on elevated ground, whence no kind of prying observation could be discerned. It is true that the way was shadowed almost to darkness, strong daylight as it still was overhead, by the lofty oaks and larch trees which skirted it, with a great deal of tangled brushwood on one side. On the other there was a deep precipitous hollow behind the irregular mound which backed the Hall, filled at the bottom with a stagnant sort of a water, or bog, creamed over partially with weeds bristling with bulrushes, and bordered by a number of weeping willows, which gave a damp and wo-begone aspect to the spot, and had obtained for it its name of the "Willow Water." Probably it had been a great fish-pond in the palmy days of the Hall, before the entail began to

run so nigh the present possessor's relinquishment.

Having satisfied herself by her own eagle survey, rather than the assurances of her companion, that there was no reason to apprehend espionage, Miss Clanbrassey replied to the bailiff's extraordinary observation no less extraordinarily.

"I must have been mad when the bare idea entered my head, either of Scotland or Scarboborough! No doubt I have been maddened all along by the pernicious effects of that intoxicating drug which you were the first to thrust upon my knowledge and use!—which rendered my whole brain the sport of any hallucinations you might choose to offer to its vagaries, devilish conjuror that you are!—and since you took so base an advantage of the deliriums of imagination and the senses it subjected me to."

No hatred, no contempt, no abhorrence could surpass—or, perhaps, ought to have surpassed—those concentrated in the look the unhappy woman cast upon her miserable betrayer. So it would seem! as she uttered these words.

Blackmore's dull eyes certainly retaliated with

an unwonted lighting up of rage and malignancy as the denunciation reached his hearing. But he replied with the sang-froid he thought it necessary to preserve against her violence.

"A wonderful story, truly! I am a wizard, I suppose, and deal in love-philtres! Or am I to blame because you overstepped all reason and common sense, as you always do in everything, in the use of a medication which I had found of the most singular advantage in my own complaint—this ugly asthma that has lurked in me ever since I took my part in the draining of the great bog of Kintore—and recommended it to you for the black vapours and megrims that were always hanging over you, and threatened in the end to develop the sources of madness in you, in their direst form—which, from all that I can gather of your family, seems to have been for generations roaring in fever, or stagnating into melancholy madness, in your ill-mixed Irish blood?"

"Well! no doubt what you did was all done with the best intentions. Hell is paved with such, Mr. Blackmore. Let's say no more about that. But, remember, I only promised

to take the miserable step I have disappointed you in not taking, which would degrade me at once to nigh the lowest level of society, and break utterly the heart of the kind and good man who has sheltered me and mine so long with such ill results to himself—if a direful necessity should be found to exist. If I found I had no escape from one abyss of shame and misery but by plunging down the lowest of all—Yet in preference to that, without any figure of speech, I would have cast myself down this scaur into the pond below! But I could not tell what discoveries might follow on the desperate deed, even were I dead and suffocated in those foul waters there—unless they could cover me till doomsday. I was glad of it afterwards that I did not, when, as I tell you, I discovered there was no necessity for either fatal and irremediable act," Miss Clanbrassey now replied, staring with a species of fierce triumph in her gaze, at her stricken auditor, who seemed at once strangely perplexed and baffled, too, by what he heard.

"You have consulted physicians, then," he said; and it is to be noted that, when he chose, he could drop the dialect of his remote province

in everything but a peculiar see-saw accentuation,—"and they have told you, you were in a condition to defy and balk me thus?"

"They have told me that nothing ailed me but the indiscreet use of *opium*, and that I could be easily and certainly re-established in my health, if I could bring myself to renounce the pernicious habit of its secret consumption. I have resolved to renounce it, and for ever, and with it my detestable initiation into its horrible, reason-destroying delights."

"Indeed! Varra fine, varra fine! But the devil is blamed for all the blacks in the air. You consulted physicians, Miss Featherstone,—or Miss Clanbrassey, I believe I ought to say,—on your case, in Liverpool?" Blackmore observed, with a sardonic smile of incredulity.

"No; I went on to Birmingham. I knew where to apply. Old Lizzie Beattie, who has been a hospital nurse there, you know——"

"No; you have been on no recommendation of hers, Miss Clanbrassey, since you tell me where to apply for information in your steps," Blackmore interrupted her, with a savage snarl of impatience and incredulity.

"Be it as you choose, my good man. Professional gentlemen are not in the habit of betraying their patients' secret to chance inquirers," replied Miss Clanbrassey, with disdain and defiance audible in all her tones, "even when they happen to be aware of their names; but I was a total stranger in Birmingham, and purpose so to remain."

"You refuse, then, to fulfil your contract, woman, and break your plighted word?" exclaimed Blackmore, with a ferocity and vehemence of which his usual cringing demeanour gave little previous intimation of capability.

"I have spoken the word! I came home determined on this explanation, and thought it best made at once and for ever," returned Miss Clanbrassey, seemingly unruffled on her part by the display. "What would you have, man? Save when under the intoxicating influence of your poison, I have always despised, detested, shunned you and your association in every respect. I look upon you now, more than ever, as a loathsome imposture—a part of the phantasmagoria of a hideous nightmare dream! Gain, also, I know to be the sole motive which

has animated you in obtaining your felonious mastery in this unhappy house; and can you doubt yourself that a discovery of any such relations as you have been so long scheming and contriving to bring about between us—or the marriage you demand—would make my uncle my mortal enemy—and justly so—and induce him to discard me for ever from his presence and goodwill? All that I hear assures me such poor good-looks as I possess—if I possess any—could never have been the object of your nefarious designs. I have always heard myself derided, even by my sisters, for my total deprivation of all feminine attraction; and you must be aware that my uncle's displeasure would make a beggar of me."

"Not at all, Miss Featherstone—not at all! You have yourself let me know that your savings already, fully authorized by Mr. Featherstone, amount to five thousand pounds! If I am allowed the management of the property in my own way, even if Mr. Featherstone should only live another five years, I'll engage to draw a thousand per annum, at the least, over all expenditure from it more than it now produces;

especially if I am suffered to proceed in the draining of the Moss! That's five thousand more! And if you would listen to reason yourself, I do not believe Mr. Featherstone is set so deadly against our union as you pretend to think, especially if he knew how little he could help himself in the case; and what much more disgraceful exposure might be made than so common a thing as a little mismatch in point of rank and station in the case! I am no beggar myself, for that matter; I could, at all events, show half sovereigns for your whole ones any day. But I am not anxious any more than yourself to thrust the position of our affairs on your uncle's knowledge, if you only put my mind at rest by fulfilling your engagement to marry me! The whole thing can remain a secret for years—till your uncle dies, even—in such a quiet place as this, so unsuspiciously as we are situated towards each other; and meanwhile, we may save enough out of the property to make us rich, and respected, and happy, all the rest of the days of our lives—and to account for our marrying one another when we do so openly at last."

"Do not annoy me any longer with this absurd talk, Blackmore! I have spoken the truth when I tell you that I hate, despise, renounce you, and all appertaining to you, and consider you as the vilest and subtlest of snakes and traitors ever harboured on a good man's hearth! Believe me now when I repeat it to you, and I will swear any oath to confirm you in the certainty of my resolution, you, or your master, the devil, can invent or impose!" Rosanna returned with an energy that stamped every word as she spoke it, as if in brass.

"Varra guid, varra guid! But there are two ay's go to one consent, ye're maybe's aware, Miss Clanbrassey! And do you think I will allow you to cast me off in this fashion, like potato peelings into the swine's tub, now your kind fancy for me is over, or some new one perhaps come up in the place?"

Rosanna's sallow complexion fevered up scarlet at this latter observation, not unmarked by her antagonist. But she answered still in tones of scorn and defiance—"Why, what can you do to hinder yourself, Mr. Abednego Blackmore?"

"I'll tell ye then, Miss! since ye don't seem

to understand much in a law-abiding way your-sel'. When a contract is made, and one of the parties refuses to observe it, the injured one has the right to compel th' ither, or to exact competent damages for a failure in the same! And that's what I should do, madam! You have promised to marry me: if you refuse to perform your contract, I will sue you at law upon it: I will bring an action against you for breach of promise of marriage! Do you hear that, and would you like it?"

Rosanna was certainly for some moments perfectly horror-stricken and stultified by this threat—the only form of menace and danger she had, perhaps, not taken into calculation.

"Unmanly villain!" she said at last, however, rallying courageously from the assault. "But how can you do so? What imaginable proof have you? I never wrote you a single word in a letter even of which you could make the smallest handle!"

"It was your cunning, doubtless, then! But I'll have myself put in the witness-box, and if the judge and jury do not believe me on my oath, at least a good many other people on this

country side, who may have had their eyes opener than you imagine, and who can believe much of a Clanbrassey lady, will give me credit for some part of my news! They will believe a good deal of it also in Liverpool; and if I recover no damages, at least I have na muckle fear to inflict some! Your uncle's proud heart—and he treats me worse than a dog—worse than I have ever been treated, sum up all my life of scorn and indignities from all the knaves, and fools, and tyrants I have served to this present hour —your uncle's proud heart will be reached as nigh this way as any other; and though you renounce the noble drug which has consoled me through all the spurns and miseries of a poor drudging, slave-man's existence hitherto—now —the time, I dare promise you, will come again when you will be glad to take refuge in what you call its madness and intoxications! Take notice what I have said, and know, besides, that poor, spurned, dependent wretch, as you deem me, Abednego Blackmore has rare gall in him to make oppression bitter, and to make him resolved in retaliating upon your grand aristocratic Featherstone selves some por-

tion of the ignominy and repulse you have always in your hearts heaped even on those who served you best!"

It was plain this view of things had not previously struck Miss Clanbrassey—that she had not calculated on such powerful passions being excited in that reptile breast, and the means of retaliation which still so evidently remained to her hateful antagonist. But she believed she had a spell to conjure down this unexpected resentment and revenge also.

"Mr. Blackmore," she said, after a pause, "it is just possible that, as you say, if you become entirely reckless of consequences to yourself, personal and otherwise, you might do me the unimaginable dishonour of coupling my name in the disgraceful, cowardly, and libellous manner with your own, you seem to believe in your power. But you will only reap the whirlwind from the wind which you may raise. Whereas, if you agree to part civilly, and without any such detestable treason against all manhood and decency on your own part, I am willing to furnish you with a fair share of the money which I am assured has been your sole

motive in making me the miserable wretch I am. I have the free and absolute disposal of the five thousand pounds you speak of, and am accountable to none for it. Take the half of all I possess in the world, then, and leave me and Featherstone Hall in peace!"

Blackmore listened, but with an evident increase rather of suspicion and anger, than any other emotion. Nor was Miss Clanbrassey at all prepared for the tone in which he took up his refusal.

"I am glad you have made me this offer," he said, in a bitterly sarcastic manner; "not that I am the least in the world inclined to accept it, but that it enables me to let you see it was not your money, Miss Featherstone, but your unengaging personal self, as you so modestly affect to consider it, that has all along been the grand—the sole object of my hopes and purposes! I tell you this, that I will not accept your offer, even if you raise it to the whole five thousand; for much as you now depreciate yourself, I love you! You are handsome enough for me, madam! You have a grand intellectual mind, I hear; and you are nobly de-

scended, and born of ancient gentlefolks. And the wretched serf's son, who has won you for his wife, will sooner submit to be chopped into a thousand pieces—put under ploughshares of red-hot steel, and furrowed into the soil—than resign the rights you have given him, and he will claim with his dying breath! Ugh, ugh, ugh!'

Whatever might otherwise have been the effect of so unexpected a burst of a genuine personal devotion, as it might have seemed in the Scotch bailiff, was quite destroyed by his unlucky asthmatic cough at the conclusion.

"It seems as if one might not have long to wait for that result, Blackmore! But beware, in your turn, how you drive me to despair. You have not been ill-informed that my family is capable of very extraordinary actions when its tempestuous blood is raised!" Miss Clanbrassey answered; and, in truth, an indistinct but terrible thought went past her staring gaze almost visually, like a spectre of the slain, with its horrors wrapped from sight in the shroud. "But surely," she continued, with a more pathetic form of appeal, "you have done me in-

jury enough already—to my own heart and feelings, and sense of honour of every sort!—But we will have time enough to consider the fairest and best terms for us to part on, and for you to weigh at leisure my proposition. I should like you to embrace the opportunity it was all along arranged you should take, to revisit Scotland, and see your old mother again before she dies. You might even avail yourself of the return-chaise that brought me here to get to the railway; and, after a fortnight or three weeks, passed asunder, we may meet again to discuss matters more calmly. From what you have said, moreover, I apprehend my uncle will, any way, resolve upon parting with you; but your absence might afford me time to smooth over matters with him, too."

"But will you do so? It's varra guid, meanwhile, varra guid of you, indeed, to remember me of my excursion—and my poor old mother, too, hundreds of miles away! Ye're varra keen to get half the island's distance between us, Miss Featherstone. Is there to be more company than Madam Countess? You forget, also, that I was to have some talk with

the other old gentleman—the great Welsh geologist you met in Liverpool—about the best means to get rid of the rocks in the drainage of our moss!" returned the suspicious bailiff, without adopting any very inscrutable disguise to his innuendo.

Miss Clanbrassey, however, saw the danger she was running upon, and affecting at once to recall the circumstance to her mind, she replied, with lips that vibrated with a strange pang as well as with suppressed indignation as she spoke, "Ah, truly, Mr. Pendragon! Well, you might stay to see him on the subject you mention, and then—"

But at this point of the dialogue both the parties were startled by the noise of approaching footsteps, and Miss Clanbrassey, hurriedly exclaiming, "It is my uncle!" went forward as if to meet him, while the bailiff slunk as hastily off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

It was, in reality, Mr. Featherstone who now turned the woody mound, sheltered behind which from the north and east winds, stood his ancient family seat. Mr. Featherstone, with his gun upon his shoulder, in an easy brown velveteen shooting dress, which he now rarely exchanged for any kind of state costume; and with a ruddy glow upon his healthy, fresh-coloured face, in spite of the grey hair that fluttered round it under his low-crowned, turn-up-rimmed white hat. Still erect, still resolute and springy in his step, and with his intelligent and strongly-passioned physiognomy alit with even more than its customary irritability of feeling and expression, under the sparkle of what

Rosanna, accustomed to watch its variations, perceived at a glance were angry and sternly-knit eyes.

Most contrary to what might have been expected also, he did not seem pleased or mollified by the approach of his favourite niece, after so unusual an absence.

He even called her Miss Clanbrassey! A name which hardly ever, as a rule, passed his lips. He sometimes playfully, indeed, addressed her as Miss Featherstone, which was almost invariably her designation in the house and among the tenantry.

"Back again at last, Miss Clanbrassey! I was beginning to think you had quite taken up with your Liverpool friends, and had left me free from every species of woman-kind at the Haugh, for ever and a day! Was that Blackmore with you when I came round the Moat?"

Mr. Featherstone asked the question in a very displeased tone; perhaps vexed at the flushed and excited appearance of his niece when they thus encountered.

"Yes, my dear uncle, it was Mr. Blackmore. He was telling me about all the stupid things

he has been doing since I was away. He really seems to go altogether on his own head now. It is quite strange and presuming, I declare! But I hope you do not blame me so completely for his doings, that you make me no kinder welcome home than to reproach me with them?" Rosanna said, and with an emotion which was thoroughly unfeigned. She looked at her uncle, indeed, with a yearning tenderness and indescribable underglow of such mingled and most pathetic anguish of grief, remorse, and appeal, that his chivalrous man's nature was touched in all its chords.

"My dearest girl—my poor, kind, unhappy Rosanna!—what makes you look so strangely at me? Of course I make you welcome back to your home—it is yours as much as my own, and more so—a thousand times! And no father's heart could receive you to it more lovingly and trustingly than your uncle's always has and shall!" And he kissed her very kindly and fondly, and took her hand, and was so startled by the chill upon it in contrast to her burning face, that he set down his gun, and began to chafe it between his; while his dogs, gathering

round him to the number of quite a dozen, looked on askant, but seemed to think they had no part to take in the demonstration. Perhaps the sagacious brutes were aware that on more than one occasion Miss Clanbrassey had heard without dissent her bailiff's reasoning against the necessity of so many superfluous, eating creatures being kept about the place, now that the Squire so seldom called upon their services, as a sportsman!

"You spoke rather crossly, uncle, as if you thought I was to blame in accepting Mrs. Marrynett's invitation to the christening. I am sure I have enjoyed myself at it as little as any person could possibly desire I should," replied Rosanna, resuming with an effort something of her usual tone, ascendancy, and sway with Mr. Featherstone.

"I did not believe you would much, with those vulgar, purse-proud people, dear! No, I was not thinking at all of that. I should have been very glad if you had enjoyed yourself a little. I begin to be afraid that I have kept you a little too selfishly to myself about the old place here, especially now I am growing older,

and not much company for you in out-door movements," Mr. Featherstone answered, with affection and regretful self-accusation in all his tones. But he went on, in a changed voice and with evident irritation, to observe: "What annoys and vexes me, Rosanna, is that you should have set up that Scotchman in such a tyrannous sway and insolence that, I believe, he almost begins to fancy himself the Lord of the Manor! I have been finding out all kinds of things in that way ever since you have been absent—my attention being first called to it by a rather singular circumstance. The very day you went off, I got so tired of sitting alone and yawning over the newspaper, with nobody to speak to, or exchange an idea with, that I thought I would take a walk to the Lodge, and inquire if anybody was looking properly after your guinea-fowls and my pheasants, and how poor Mopsy was getting on. But when I arrived there, I heard such a noise of women crying and sobbing in the place, I was quite amazed, and walked in without letting the people know who was there. And there I found Mrs. Ullathorn and her pretty young daughter (the girl's

like a fresh-blown, living young damask rose, and quite embellishes the old tumble-down place with her presence, since she came to live at the Lodge from her grandmother's, who is dead, I believe, quite lately) weeping and wailing fit to break their hearts, and the hearts of all who heard them. And what do you think about? Because this wonderful bailiff of yours had taken a fancy to have the whole farmhouse to himself, without any reason that I can possibly imagine, for I don't hear he is going to make any woman miserable as a wife. And so he had ordered the under-bailiff and his family to pack up that very night, and take up their abode in the ruinous old gamekeeper's hut at the other side of the park, you know! I was so amazed at the daring insolence of the thing, without consulting me or anybody—even you, Rosanna, so far as I can learn—that I should have spoken my mind pretty freely to him at the time, had he been in the way. But to crown the affair, he had gone off to market with a fellow driving Mopsy, without leave or licence, and had been gone so long that it was useless to send after him. But that introduced the subject, and

finding she was to be protected, Mrs. Ullathorn set to work and told me such a number of stories about the man's hard-hearted, tyrannous doings on the estate, that I determined to make inquiries on a more general scale, and ascertain the truth for myself. And so I did—and I never heard such accounts as I have since, on all sides, about your grand vizier. Why, Anna! he is improving the estate into a complete desert! Half my tenantry have vanished, or have received notices to quit—those, you know, that had not leases on my life! And as fast as the farms fall in upon these extraordinary evictions, I find Blackmore takes the land into his own hands, and it seems likely to end with his being the only name on our rent-roll! Upon my honour, Rosanna, I don't think it either proper or safe to place us in such a position, I may almost say of dependency, on a greedy stranger fellow like that. And I always thought you had too much of the spirit of a Queen Elizabeth in you to allow your authority and power —deputed into your hands, to be sure—to be engrossed and taken up in such a manner to himself by a menial prime minister of the sort!

I tell you candidly, if I had not apprehended you would be seriously annoyed by the loss of your favourite's services, I would have given him half a year's wages and the sack that very first night of your departure."

"It would not have annoyed me, uncle!—Not much!" replied Miss Clanbrassey, troubled with what she felt was the look of scrutiny and inquiry fixed upon her by her uncle. "But it would have thrown everything on the estate into confusion—and, besides, Blackmore has secured several parcels of land to his own use, under grants you could not quite withdraw all at once. I am glad you did not proceed to any sudden thing of that sort—by which he might fairly have thought himself aggrieved. What was done about the Ullathorns? Now I remember, the puritanical good man would have it, the girl was too pretty to remain among all those men-servants and people of the farm, and said she would be better at a distance from them. He means well, but he has his Scotch notions on everything in very disagreeable strength and quality."

"I don't know that. I have always heard

the Scotch were a sturdy, independent set of fellows, in a general way. But this man carneys and fawns about one, till one is ready to knock him down, that he may lick the dust before one the easier! And what does he mean by bothering me about his family and his good original descent, but for the extravagance of some great great grandfather reducing them all to want? When he came here first, he seemed rather proud to have only the poorest people for his progenitors—and I rather respected him for it! And now, forsooth, the Blackmores belong to some great clan in the north of Scotland, every red-shank of whom have been gentlemen-born since Adam or Fingal, whichever of them was before the other! What can the idiot mean?"

Rosanna, trembling in secret with indignant consciousness, was yet fain to declare she could not tell. And the hesitation of her manner probably vaguely increased Mr. Featherstone's irritation.

"On my own part, Rosanna," he continued, clearing his voice, and resuming his gun, having certainly warmed his niece's hands by chafing

them, while her face had grown proportionately pale, "I own I have often wondered of late to see you going about so much with a common servant-fellow like that, who was not even employed to carry your pattens for you. You go wherever he pleases to summon you; see with his eyes, hear with his ears, only! That will never do, my girl! If you do manage the estate, still I think you ought not to forget the lady in the agriculturist, and go tramping about in the miry fields, listening to the oracles of a conceited Triptolemus like Blackmore. You have no business with the working part of the affair; results alone concern us; we hire these people to save us trouble that way."

"And yet but this moment, uncle, you found fault with me for trusting too completely and implicitly to the man! And you forget, also, that the whole bent and object of the education you have bestowed on me—by your own account—has been to make me forget that I was a woman even! Let alone a lady!"

Rosanna spoke with a bitterness she could not repress, and which her uncle very clearly discerned. But he seemed rather saddened

than vexed by the blame that his niece thus threw on his conduct towards herself.

"I do begin to think I have taken upon me more than I ought, in the way of attempting to train you out of what Nature must always have intended a woman to be!" he said, moodily. "But consider, Anna dear! what women have been to me! how they have treated me after all my kindness to them! I don't allude to your poor mother now; you need not look so startled, girl! It was folly with her—sheer folly; her mind was a very weak one. But look at Charlotte and Philippina; how they behaved to me! They had not your powerful intellect and comprehension of what they were about, Rosanna, it is true. But they had average sense, and therefore their misbehaviour towards me wants the excuse of ignorance, and was cruel and unprincipled in the extreme. Supposing even that Charlotte had a right to please herself, a girl without fortune marrying a rich parvenu; see how Philippina disgraced herself and the whole family by rushing into an alliance with an infamous adventurer and impostor, merely because he pretended to be a Count! It is true, the

stupid woman might fancy she was marrying a person of birth and connexions, and that is some apology with me. But I could never forgive a woman for wilfully, and with her eyes open, descending in the scale of society! It is an infamy that I could never pardon!"

Mr. Featherstone spoke with a tremble of passion mingled with apprehension in his tones, which could scarcely have escaped Rosanna's observation, though he drew her hand, as he spoke, into his arm, kindly enough, and at the conclusion whistled, with an affectation of cheeriness, to his dogs to rise and accompany them on their return to the house.

There was evidently an emphatic pause; but Miss Clanbrassey answered as if unconscious of the meaning of the last observation, though she was quite well aware in her own mind, now, that the clamour against the bailiff had not been confined, during her absence, altogether to his arbitrary proceedings in the management of the estate!

"Nor ought you, sir!" she replied to her uncle's last observation, in tones even startlingly acquiescent, but eluding the point of the remark

with great dexterity. "You have suffered too much already in that way, however advantageous in money respects the Marrynett connexion has proved. Indeed, the Marrynetts seem now to have abandoned all hope of ever being reconciled to you. But my sister Philippina either pretends, or feels, so much gratitude to you for your sustained kindness towards her, that she would not hear of leaving this part of the country without making you a visit of thanks. Of course, uncle, I could not be off saying you would be glad to see her."

"You said anything but the truth, then! I wish you would send her word, Rosanna, that I consider her love and duty sufficiently proved by all the important acts of her life, and that she need not come to give me any additional assurance, as I won't cut her off her allowance until she sends me word herself that her brother's liberality enables her to dispense with it altogether. Her brother! I wonder what sort of stuff brothers are made of nowadays! There's a fellow now has been rich for years—a widower for I don't know how long—and I daresay hasn't asked twice in two-and-twenty years

whether his sisters were revelling in the heights of affluence, or sunk to the lowest depths of pauperism and misery."

"I have never thought of that—of him, uncle! You have been everything to me—father, mother, sisters, brothers — everything!" said Rosanna, with a degree of fervid passion in her utterance that attested how thoroughly in earnest she was in the expression. "Still," she continued, in a lower, and, as it were, withdrawn tone, "I do not suppose we should have been the worse—as you say, uncle—for a little more communion with the world. And, besides, my sister is not likely to make a long visit, unless you are most particularly pressing. To be sure, there is another person she had so bespoken into her train, that I could not well avoid asking him, too. But this is an addition to the pleasure of Madame de la Mazurka's company which I think will really prove one to you. It is quite a gentleman who——"

"It cannot be, Rosanna, from that horrid place!" returned the county gentleman, much excited — not pleasantly, it was quite plain. "And in Philippina's train, too! It is quite

out of the question! It must be some commercial knave or the other that I suppose she thinks to make a purse of, out of deference to her senseless title. If it had been any friend of your selection, Rosanna——"

"It is, uncle! At least, he was most kind and attentive to me while I was in Liverpool; and I asked him for that, and because I thought he would please you a great deal more than Flippy's nonsense of having him as a dangler in her train!" replied Miss Clanbrassey, surprised at her uncle's observation—"If it had been *her* friend!"—but greatly pleased by it. "It is a person you will be sure to like—I say again—just like yourself—fond of books and curious scientific researches, and field sports, too. Perfectly gentlemanly manners, I assure you; a gentleman, in fact, of the best blood in Wales, a sort of prince there, though not so rich at present as he ought to be, and will be, when some great mines he is trying to work answer his expectations. But I daresay you have heard of him—Mr. Pendragon, of Pendragon Mohr, and M.P. for his division of the county."

"Mr. Pendragon, of Pendragon Mohr? To be sure I have: they thought at one time he was going to cut quite a great figure in Parliament on our side of the question, only the senseless people snub everything that professes to maintain the ancient glories and conservative feeling of the country. What! Pendragon dangling after a brainless coquette like that Mazurka creature? Well may they say that of all fools an old fool—"

"It is, perhaps, only—it is quite certainly only—Philippina's own ridiculous fancy that Mr. Pendragon is paying her his devoirs! Nobody knows even whether she is a widow yet; she don't know herself. And Mr. Pendragon is the very soul of honour, and no more likely to take up with a woman of doubtful position like that than—I mean his real motive, I believe, is to talk geology with you, uncle! He owns quite a long range of mountains, teeming with millions' worth of copper ore, he believes; and that is how the Marrynetts became acquainted with him, and Mr. Marrynett is going in with him to get up a company to work his mines. And I am going to speculate

in them, too: I am to get I don't know what per cent. for the money you have allowed me to save up. And when I told him how fond you were of geology once, and what a deal you knew about it—"

"My dear child! what are you saying?" interrupted Mr. Featherstone, but not in a displeased way, at this point. "I don't know a single thing in the world about geology! Whatever could have possessed you to——"

"Don't you, though; uncle?" said Miss Clanbrassey, with a great appearance of surprise, but possibly appearance only. "What a strange thing! And what a terrible fool he will think me! But I made so certain you knew all about rocks and mountains with everything else you have studied; I thought, indeed, there was nothing you did not know. However, it don't matter. Mr. Pendragon can talk enough on his subject for you and everybody else, if you do but let him alone. You need not confess my ignorance of the bounds of your knowledge during the short time he will be among us!—unless you ask him to prolong his stay!"

"That, I am sure I sha'n't, if he has taken up with the footpads and robbers of the Liverpool Exchange, unless it be to warn him sufficiently of what he has to expect for his property, if he be fool enough to place both it and himself under my beloved nephew-in-law's care and guidance," returned Mr. Featherstone, with great indignation.

"Oh, pray do not, uncle! It will be all useless; everything is settled and arranged now. You will only make him uncomfortable! And, besides, you will soon perceive that Mr. Pendragon is in no need of advice to know what to do. He is not a man to be led by the nose; but is one of the largest intellect that ever——"

"The very kind to be cheated by the smallest! Great intellects don't understand the meanness and trickery of the little ones; and a rat may creep into a lion's throat and choke him! I'll leave nothing on my conscience about Father Marrynett, you shall see, if Mr. Pendragon comes in my way; and if you, too, are turned trickster and dealer in commercial dirt-pies. But I thought what would come of

the contagion of that place!—How old is this Mr. Pendragon? Why, he can't be much younger than I am myself!" Mr. Featherstone rather queerly broke off.

"Oh, yes, uncle; he is certainly fifteen or twenty years younger, at least!" exclaimed Rosanna, with an eagerness which a moment after she repented, until she observed with surprise Mr. Featherstone's pleased and satisfied look.

"Well, I suppose he may be—fifteen years younger he may be, perhaps. However, Anna, dear! any one you invite—you haven't troubled me much in that way in your time—shall always be welcome to my house," he said, with a kindliness of assent that deeply gratified her. "Only what I wish for, and insist upon, is, that I won't have myself and my property put in a strait-jacket by this Scotch bailiff. I'll get rid of him at any price, and altogether, as speedily as possible. I don't like him at all; and everybody else hates him. Just you encourage the Ullathorns to say what they think about him, Rosanna! You'll be quite shocked to think that you are supposed to patronize the

fellow in everything he does, as if you were under his control, instead of his being under yours!—You will find the Ullathorns where you left them, I'll promise you; and I don't suppose, though they keep the great man's kitchen for him, they ever exchange a word together now!"

"Nobody, indeed, came out of the gate when I arrived except the bailiff," said Miss Clanbrassey, striving to smile, though with very poor success.

"Well, just you put Master Blackmore up to my ideas, Anna, and get rid of him as fast as you can; in the mildest way you choose, if your own interests are concerned; but do it!" Mr. Featherstone said, with a stress on the words that left no doubt he meant what he said.

Rosanna gave a deep sigh; but she seemed to muster up resolution upon that.

"It is not for me, sir," she said, "to take upon myself so far the functions of master of the establishment and of the Featherstone property. But if you told Mr. Blackmore you were not satisfied with his manner of managing it—how-

ever much I might be—and desired him to go on the visit he has been so anxious to make, to see his relations in Scotland, immediately, while you made up your mind whether you wished to retain his services or not, it would be more comfortable to state what you find amiss, and discharge him at a distance, there—with proper compensation for any loss he may sustain in consequence. I have some ready money that is quite at your service in this respect! But I beg of you not to subject me to the man's remonstrances and nuisances of that sort; for I really sometimes think he is crazy enough to imagine I have more regard for him than for a mere servant whom I believe to be useful. And nothing would annoy me more than——"

"I'll let him understand he must leave Featherstone for Scotland, at the double-quick!" said Mr. Featherstone, turning quite white with passion, but looking infinitely relieved and satisfied also.

"No; on reflection, I think I had better do it myself, on your orders, uncle! He will understand the thing to be meant more completely if he receives his dismissal from me—that there

is no influential appeal whatever for him!" Miss Clanbrassey replied, assailed with a new dread of the effects her uncle's violence and rashness of disdain might produce. And as he seemed to acquiesce, after a brief interval of thoughtfulness, in the arrangement, it was so concluded; and Rosanna changed the subject of conversation, with a visible effort, to her recent adventures and experiences, gay and the reverse, in Liverpool.

CHAPTER IV.

A LIMÈD SOUL, STRUGGLING TO BE FREE.

MR. FEATHERSTONE listened to all Rosanna's Liverpool stories with the interest persons of secluded habits oftener take in the bustling movements of the world, than those who share in them. The story of the returned convict, which had already become the subject of newspaper reports, quite delighted him.

"I am sorry for the poor old fellow," he said, "but to think that the Marrynetts should have overreached themselves at last to the tune of fifty thousand pounds is very satisfactory!"

Rosanna spared him as much as she could of the magnificence of the christening; of the love affairs of the younger girls she herself knew next to nothing, not being esteemed a suitable con-

fidante. She could, therefore, tell little, and she told nothing. But she remarked, with growing satisfaction on her own account, that the more she harped on the string, the more her uncle was pleased when she mentioned Mr. Pendragon in terms of eulogium, or dwelt on his great and noble qualities, personal and mental. Not that she herself was at all convinced that her hopes with regard to this accomplished and highborn gentleman were assured of any realization. That ecstatic vision had melted away in the darkened daylight of Featherstone Haugh, or, at best, had left only scattered flecks of purple brightness over the moody sky. But it comforted her own heart to find herself still capable of an exalted and unselfish tenderness, and she saw that it contributed more than anything else she could have said or done to dissipate her uncle's unhappy, though certainly limited suspicions, of the nature of her relations with the detestable bailiff.

On one point Miss Clanbrassey was resolved. She would break off her ill-advised connexion with that person, and deplorable subjection to his designing purposes. The problem only was

how to do it without compromising her own reputation, or ruining herself in the good opinion of her uncle.

Difficulties encountered her at the first step. In spite of all the bustle and movement of preparation for the distinguished visitors that prevailed, almost immediately, at the Hall and its approaches, Blackmore did not make his appearance among the impressed farm-servants and villagers. Consequently, Rosanna found no opportunity to deliver Mr. Featherstone's permission to that worthy to absent himself on his visit to his relations; which she intended to soften and disguise as well as she could, but so as to secure an immediate acquiescence in the plan. And when towards evening, noticing this circumstance, she made inquiries for "Mr. Blackmore," she learned, with a secret consciousness of a harmful meaning in the pretext, that the bailiff had complained on a sudden of being very ill with his asthma, and had betaken himself to his bed at the Lodge.

Both Rosanna and her uncle felt foiled by this manœuvre, for both suspected and believed it to be one, though Mr. Featherstone only gave

vent to his opinion. "Hang the fellow! It is a dodge, I suppose, though how he can have found out our intentions puzzles me!" Rosanna stood the bailiff's friend, however, in this instance, and remarked that he was rather subject to attacks of the kind, and had of late been always prowling about in the damp "Moss," studying his plans of drainage of that extensive tract. But it was a complete countermove. Miss Clanbrassey, of course, could not visit a man-servant in his bedroom; and Mr. Featherstone absolutely refused to show the slightest mark of attention and respect of the kind to Abednego Blackmore. "It will put him on fancying I think something of him and his Gaelic genealogy, after all, and don't mean to turn him off—on which I am as fixed as Lancaster Castle! If you only ask a scheming rascal like that what o'clock it is, he takes his advantages!" Mr. Featherstone said; and Rosanna dared not press the matter.

She hit upon a middle way, however, and sent old Dobson, the major-domo at the Hall, to the bailiff in his retreat: with Miss Clanbrassey's compliments, and she was very sorry

to hear that he was taken so unwell; but hoped that a visit to his native air would do him good, which Mr. Featherstone particularly desired he would take; and at that comparatively idle season of the year, before harvest-work came on, she (Miss Clanbrassey) felt she could quite comfortably relieve him for a few weeks from the trouble and responsibilities of his office as general superintendent of the estate.

Dobson, who loved the bailiff as little as anyone—or less, perhaps, than others, annoyed at his favour with his young lady—gladly undertook this task, and, encouraged by Miss Clanbrassey's evident earnestness to obtain the result, brought back a faithful—a too faithful—account of its failure.

He said, he never saw anybody looking so "unsightsome" and queer as Mr. Blackmore, into whose apartment he could hardly get admittance, as he was wonderfully locked and bolted in. But when he did so, he found him hard at work, packing up a lot of papers and some bundles of clothes and bedding in a large box, covered with dust and sweat, and munching, as he thought, some black stuff like tobacco.

Otherwise he showed no symptoms of being ill. But when the message was delivered to him, he had replied, with his duty to "Miss Featherstone," that he felt too seriously unwell to avail himself of her and the Squire's great kindness at that moment: and was, besides, most anxious to get the drainage works at the Moss in progress before his departure. At the same time, not being very comfortable at the Lodge, after recent events, and to show that he meant no harm to the Ullathorns by having suggested their removal to the deserted gamekeeper's cottage, called "the Hut," which was close on the morass, he meant to take himself off there, and look after things as usual till he felt better able to undertake a long journey.

"But, in point of fact, Miss," continued Dobson, with an indignantly serious mien, "Muster Blackmore as good as told me that he had almost as much interest as the Squire's hainsel' in the lands about the Ha' here, and that he should never think of leaving his propriety to the management of womenfolk that knew so little about the matter, at this most particular time for the crops, that are a'most yellow for the

reaping-hook, or will be if the fair weather holds on for another three weeks or a month !"

"He is going to the Hut—and complaining of asthma!" exclaimed Rosanna, much startled indeed, but not by the concern for the bailiff that her words indicated. "What an ill-omened place, too! Was it not deserted, Dobson, because the last man that had the care of it hanged himself in a fit of the glooms, at the loneliness and melancholy of all around? Let him go there, by all means, then!" she concluded, bitterly, but feeling that it would be dangerous to cross Blackmore in his strange determination. "And it is true he has the park-grazing and some of the outlying cold lands on the Moss, on a short lease, to reclaim, as he says, Dobson! Uncle will hardly know whether he is there or in Scotland, if only he removes out of his sight from the Lodge; and the Ullathorns cannot possibly be expected to get on comfortably with a man who tried to turn them out of their snuggery into such a wild, unwholesome banishment."

Miss Clanbrassey endeavoured to give the singular affair this turn to Dobson and his

fellow-servants, who were bound to take her elucidation for the gospel of the matter.

But her task was more difficult with Mr. Featherstone. However, she explained to him that she had in reality assigned a sort of partnership interest in the reclaiming of the bog, and divers surrounding oases of grass and meadow land, to the grasping steward, which he had authorized by his signature. Consequently they could not proceed to any summary action in the affair. At all events, they had better not attempt any until the visit from Liverpool was over, as summary action would probably lead to disagreeable and, it might be, noisy discussions—but let the bailiff have his own way in what he proposed, which would remove his unwelcome presence out of sight, at all events. In other respects, his control over the property could be easily diminished, or even cast off altogether, by the owner's personal interference. And he would possibly get tired of forcing his unwished association on proprietors who so evidently repudiated his plans and theories of management, and withdraw, of his own accord, from further trouble and interference.

Mr. Featherstone was at first highly indignant at such a sustained opposition to his determination. But Rosanna's earnest entreaties for peace and quiet, for awhile at least, and her assurances that he had in reality signed papers which rendered it highly desirable to temporize in getting rid of so masterful a servant, induced him at last to resolve on letting things take their own course till he had time to "look further into them," and perhaps obtain legal advice. He made some passionate reflections, however, to Miss Clanbrassey on the folly and undue confidence she had exhibited towards this stranger by binding him down to such engagements, almost unknown to himself; and she perceived, with increasing secret anxiety, that her uncle's former deeper uneasiness and vague mistrust returned.

She only, indeed, succeeded in a slight degree in removing this impression, and bringing a smile to his irritated countenance, by saying that Blackmore might perhaps take his predecessor's example, and so rid them of all further trouble on that score! And that, but

for the scandal of the repeated case, she heartily hoped he would.

"And, in reality," she added, with a singularly moody and self-involved air of thought, "Blackmore is a very gloomy fellow, and I have heard him talk of suicide, as if he rather relished the idea. Then he is always drugging himself with some strange stuff he gets from the chemists in Liverpool. Neil Gowrie, the carrier, often brings it to him, and it makes him at times quite foolish and besotted, as if he was drunk; and afterwards he is so dejected and downhearted, that it is quite pitiable to see him. But he can't help it, I suppose, on account of his asthma. And he will soon find out that the fogs and mists of the Moss do not compose the kind of atmosphere fittest for an asthmatic to inhale."

"Upon my honour, Rosanna, this Scotch gentleman, of the most ancient breechless descent, is a remarkably various person in his tastes and humours!" Mr. Featherstone replied, with much asperity. "Do you know what, some time ago, he had the hardihood to suggest to me, and which surprised me very

greatly at the time, though I never mentioned it before? He complained to me of the cold and farmyard exhalations about the lodge, and threw out a pretty plain innuendo that as there were so many apartments vacant at the Hall, which were unused all the year round, mightn't he as well take up his abode with us here? He would even be content, he condescendingly observed, with an upper chamber in the old tower—among the family muniments and papers, I suppose! I thought it was only his Scotch notions of saving fire and candle-light at our expense in the hall-kitchen at the time; but still it annoyed me. And I told him pretty sharply—at all events, in a way he understood—that I should as soon think of lodging my cows and bullocks under the same roof with myself, as the people whose business it was to look after them. And now it seems 'Hang-dog Hut,' as the people call it, is good enough for him! You know Bill Brackenbury hung his dog with himself; and that appears to have struck the public attention more than what one would consider the main fact, in the stupid creature's manner of earthing himself up in a

hole of his own for ever. But he did not do it in a fit of the dismals, as you seem to suppose the landscape may influence others to go and do likewise! Brackenbury did it all for love; on account of that very pretty young girl at the lodge, who was almost a child then, and would have nothing whatever to say to him. And indeed, I must say, she looks far above the wooing of a rough fellow like that."

Rosanna had never before heard of this signal act of imprudence and audacity committed by the bailiff in trying to instal himself under her uncle's roof—probably in consequence of its ignominious repulse.

The hectic fire glowed out on her cheek-bones as she heard the full account, and then the recollection dived down to join the ever-accumulating sense of exasperation and desperate resolve to be freed, in some manner or other, from the nightmare oppression that weighed upon all the energies and hopes of her existence, and bound her up as if in the icy spell of a living and conscious death.

No obstacle or counter invitation—as it is almost possible the bailiff hoped or anticipated

from the menacing character he threw upon his movements and previous intimations—arising, Blackmore was finally compelled to carry out the plan he had announced. He withdrew to "Hang-Dog Hut" in a single cart, with his luggage and a few articles of furniture belonging to himself, declining any other assistance; though his subaltern, willing enough to facilitate the departure, or in ironical triumph, volunteered every assistance in his power.

But those who marked his departure, taking the dark and sandy road which led by steep declivities to the Moss, declared they had never seen mortal man look so gloomy and discomfited before, and blessed themselves that they were not likely to be the subject of the scowling meditation in which he continued plunged while engaged in the removal. And his disgrace at the Hall being rendered palpable and clear by the operation, conjoined with his own unpopularity, rendered it unlikely that this exile to the marshy Siberia of Featherstone Haugh would find many sources of consolation and society either in the new resting-place, or in the continued exercise of an authority which it speedily

became known Blackmore retained in a manner against the wishes of the proper and beloved proprietor—Squire of that ilk.

However, one great object seemed secured to Miss Clanbrassey by the exodus. The Moss and its overlooking cot were separated from the Hall by more than two good miles over the Park and a scattered and broken tract of country that lay beyond it. Consequently the bailiff's jealous surveillance was effectually removed from her doings there, and, at all events, could in turn be observed and guarded against. Her uncle was partly satisfied again by the plain certainty that she entered heartily, and without underhand contravention, into his designs of getting rid of his domineering bailiff, whose familiar companionship with her, had been hinted to him in a style which he now considered to be the exaggeration of a justifiable dislike and resentment of the ill-usage projected by the suspect, or put into active operation long before.

"The poor fellows, but especially the woman—pretty May's mother—knew that nothing could set me so against their tyrant as the bare sus-

picion—! Bah! it is utter nonsense, or all my teachings and education ought to be considered the theories and contrivances of a lunatic, entirely ignorant of a watchmaker's trade, undertaking to convert a shaving-box into a first-rate repeater!" Mr. Featherstone soliloquised on more than one occasion, after he had clearly ascertained at the Lodge that the bailiff was gone thence with every scrap and vestige of his ownership he could collect, to his distant banishment, without a single word of remonstrance or deprecation having been addressed to him by his niece. And also, as he clearly got to understand, without her exchanging a single private word with him by speech, message, or writing, excepting to send Dobson to say that if there was anything in the stores at the Hall that could be useful to Mr. Blackmore in taking up his abode so far from his usual sources of supply, he had only to send the housekeeper word.

The bailiff replied with many humble thanks that he was a man of few wants, and had these all amply provided for; or, if he required anything else, Neil, the carrier, would kindly take

the trouble to execute any little commission he might find requisite to have executed.

"Does he think to break my heart by so much extra desolation and denial of all creature comforts to himself?" Miss Clanbrassey murmured scornfully to herself, when she received the reply. "Wicked idiot! to fancy so! Let him double his doses of opium, then! He has often told me that they open the gates of paradise for him, and that he has nothing more to desire on earth when he is in one of his complete states of bang!"

Nevertheless, Mr. Blackmore took occasion to fancy he had forgotten some trifles in his late apartments, on the day, and about the hour, when he had learned that the visitors from Liverpool were expected. And he was glaring down halfway out of one of the low windows, when Madame the Countess de la Mazurka, attended by Mr. Pendragon, as her cavalier for the nonce, rolled in at the avenue gate, in the full dash and splendour of the showy Marrynett equipage, with its handsome liveries, and high-stepping, snow-white, two pairs of horses, glittering in silver harness, and decorated with

bunches of flowers in their ears, and coachman and postilion to match. Mrs. Marrynett had insisted that her sister should return to the Hall of her ancestors in the full glory of this display of her riches, as the most emphatic expression of continued defiance and challenge to her unforgiving relative. And the Countess's vanity, and the lack of needful time to make any alterations in the arrangement, induced her—though with some misgivings, certainly, as to the effect likely to be produced—to adopt the wealthy means of transit thus forced on her disposal!

The visitors arrived pretty closely at the hour assigned in the programme, and experienced a very cordial reception. They were both in good spirits, and well-disposed to be pleased with what they were to find. Mr. Pendragon, it is true, had some trifling drawbacks; but they were of a kind that disposed him to regard with an increase of interest the possible results of his visit. It had struck him that Mr. Marrynett was superfluously liberal in forcing money upon him, on the security of his land, and urging him to embark it all, without delay, in the rising mining speculations they had taken in hand

together. He felt uneasy on this account, and desirous to be reassured by the Marrynett connexions with one of the most esteemed and honourable landowners in the county of the trustworthiness and good intentions of the commercial head of the race. Moreover, he had that very morning received a letter from the young governess of his still younger daughters, at Pendragon Castle, describing their headstrong and reckless defiance of her authority and restraints, and tendering her resignation; which had urged upon him a consideration that the likeliest way to bring these ungovernable girls to their senses would be to give them a stepmother, of mature age, high intellectual attainments, gravity and dignity of manner, good family and position, and whose personal appearance would support the notion that his heart still clung with unaltered fidelity to the love of his youth, however necessary he had found it to place another lady at the head of his family. The truth is, the Miss Pendragons had been completely spoilt in their childhood by the indulgence of a foolish grandmother, to whose care their father had resigned them, while he

gave himself up to the luxuries of grief in solitude during a long course of foreign travel.

Madame the Countess laid herself out to be very agreeable on the way to Featherstone, for she could not yet disabuse herself of the notion of the irresistible attractions of her coquetry on any individual of the opposite sex, even of so cold and pre-engaged a character. It is very possible even—so heartless is the nature of coquettes—that Madame applied herself with the more earnestness to procure this gratification of her vanity, with a view to the annoyance and hindrance of her sister, Rosanna, in her inexplicable success! And she was only the more piqued to the effort by Mr. Pendragon's sustained withdrawal, or passive endurance of her flighty style of overture and "attrait." But still he was rather amused by the restless volatility and sharpness of her remarks, and the reckless candour, if it might be called so, of her commentaries on persons and things.

Madame the Countess allowed no pause, however, for much reflection on anything she said, while sparing nothing and nobody in the stream of her clack. She described her uncle to Mr.

Pendragon, for example, as a modern Timon, in the way of misanthropy, without the claims of the great despiser of his kind, of antiquity, to consider himself ill-used by the ingratitude of those whom he had served.

On the contrary, she drew a picture, not altogether destitute of resemblance, of egotism and selfishness on the part of the alleged generous guardian of the Clanbrasseys, which produced some effects that she did not anticipate. Mr. Pendragon was naturally led to consider that the extraordinary efforts made in the way of preserving to himself the society of his youngest niece, by Mr. Featherstone, argued strongly for her merits. And the unsparingly satirical account Madame de la Mazurka gave of her uncle's system of education, so completely carried out in the case of his favourite kinswoman, more than ever satisfied Mr. Pendragon that he had lighted on the exact sort of woman most qualified for the kind of partner and companion he desired henceforth in life. It was no drawback to a man who contemplated years of retirement, and of quiet retrieval of his affairs, to learn that Rosanna Clanbrassey had been brought up in a

seclusion which perfectly disqualified her for society. The sedate and learned hermitess, accustomed to submit her will to the will of others, answered to one of his own ideals of female excellence. And the tale accounted for a good deal of strange moodiness and brusquerie he had himself remarked in her.

Going on in this way, the Countess and Mr. Pendragon arrived at Featherstone Haugh—a portion of the world which the lady had previously described, in her Frenchified style, as a country wild and waste as the plains of the "dreary Cocytus," under the eternal sunless glimmer of a hopeless sky of fogs and gloom!

The Manor-house came in for its share of abusive description; but, as it happened that there was a deep blue heaven overhanging the whole scene, and a plentiful allowance of sunshine thence diffused below, Mr. Pendragon was agreeably disappointed on his arrival. And with his recollections of his own dreary old castle, on the top of a bleak hill, crumbling rapidly in all directions to ruin, Featherstone Hall did not seem so benighted a spot.

The sea shining in the distance, like a broad sash of purple brightness, further redeemed the dark and unattractive landscape that led to it. But he could not help agreeing with the Countess when, on the gates of the avenue being opened to their equipage by a blushing young girl from the Lodge, she exclaimed, "Mon Dieu! my sister must be crazy to leave such an extremely lovely young Hebe in full sight of a hearty old bachelor like my uncle! Did you ever see a more blooming complexion than that girl's? What can Rosanna mean by it? I must put her on her guard! And who is that dismal old fellow staring out of the window above at us? Surely that can't be this famous bailiff who—— My sister and uncle have a Scotchman they trust everything to! And most likely this is he, for she said he lived over the gateway farm-house!"

"A very disagreeable looking person certainly!" said Mr. Pendragon, giving no further thought to the subject; but most unfavourably impressed by the scowling earnestness of the scrutiny he saw fixed on himself from the gable window above. Yet, even the Countess was

compelled to admit, in her own mind, that there was no mischief to be made out of so unpromising a looking shepherd for a " bucolic intrigue" as this!

CHAPTER V.

HANG-DOG HUT.

THE avenue had been cleared and prepared for a visitation by Miss Clanbrassey's vigorously decisive arrangements, in spite of the secession of her usual principal minister, and the uncle and niece were both in readiness to receive their company, in the large, but not a little gloomy and sinister-looking "cedar parlour" of the ancient mansion, where visitors were usually welcomed—Mr. Featherstone restored, for once in a way, to a proper full suit of gentlemanly black; Miss Clanbrassey in a robe that became her very well—white cashmere, trimmed with bugles, black velvet, and lace. In truth, even in her sister's unsisterly estimation, Rosanna had never looked more lady-like, and nearer

positive handsomeness, than on this occasion, when her features were extraordinarily lighted up by the glory of the newly-created passion in her heart, and, perhaps—alas! still—by the lustrous physical glow, in its primary effects, of the baleful drug she had declared her intention to repudiate.

Certainly, in all her life she had never dressed herself with so much care and success. And—oh, magic of dress!—instead of the wonted awkward giantess, she appeared as a stately priestess of Diana—of the Tauric Diana it may be, a goddess to whom human sacrifices were acceptable! And welcome was as plainly displayed as in the lamps of an illumination in all the brightness that gleamed on those large expressive features, when Mr. Pendragon and his chattering companion made their expected appearance.

It was impossible for the least vain of mankind, indeed, to doubt the nature of the emotion which shone up thus on Miss Clanbrassey's features; and Mr. Pendragon was by no means destitute of a manly proportion of vanity. He could perceive very plainly how anxiously he was

expected, and what pleasure his arrival gave; though, perhaps, he smiled none the less to observe what trouble the Lady of Featherstone Haugh had given herself to assume an air of feminine tastes and occupation. For the first time, very likely, for years, Rosanna seemed to be engaged in knitting an antimacassar—untouched, I firmly believe, from the yellow hues of the texture and cotton, since Mrs. Primmer was abruptly ousted from the Hall. The poor woman certainly dropped three loops for every one she secured to the increment of the pattern, and started and trembled at every sound that n the least degree resembled the distant rolling of wheels. Her uncle, on his part, though he pretended to be very much absorbed in the political article in "Blackwood," choice and pithy extracts from which he fancied himself to be reading aloud, with every appearance of understanding and relish, was perhaps little less absent of mind in reality, and anxious for the coming event. Nor did he even attempt to ascribe it to the prospect of an estranged niece's return.

"I don't care a jot about Philippina, whether she comes, or whether she stays away. But,

hang it, Rosanna," he exclaimed, "I feel as nervous and uncomfortable as if something quite terrible was going to happen, instead of a commonplace visit from two persons, one a stranger to me—the other, I wish she was! Our solitary way of life makes both of us as shy as bats. How Liverpool must have annoyed you! We must go out more into society, I think, if it is not too late; perhaps, take an excursion to London, or Paris, as soon as we are well rid of your Scot. I almost do wish now you were married somewhere, my dear girl, that I might have a pretext and business to leave home, and inflict a long visit on you, and recover my acquaintance with the world while you were acquiring it."

Rosanna had no time to be surprised at her uncle's remark, of a kind so unusual with him. The door opened; and ushered in by the venerable male domestic of the establishment—who had no occasion whatever to powder his hair, but did so to do honour to such a gala day—the Countess de la Mazurka rushed in, in an overpowering flurry of emotion. And before her uncle could be at all aware of her

purpose, she had thrown herself, with outstretched arms, and a proper proportion of shrieking continental ecstacy, on his neck, exclaiming, "O mon oncle! mon très cher oncle! Best, dearest, kindest of relations! how many years it is since I have seen you!"

"You don't see me now, Philippina!—you can't see me, hugging at me this way! And you do not allow me to thank Mr. Pendragon for the obliging trouble he has taken to be your escort, and to favour such hermits as we are at Featherstone with so distinguished a visit," said Mr. Featherstone, freeing himself really with some roughness from the Countess's excessive demonstrations. But he had missed what he wished to see—the meeting between his younger niece and the Welsh gentleman, which had taken place in perfect silence on both sides. But Mr. Pendragon held the hand he received an expressive moment beyond what was at all requisite in the way of polite greeting; and eyeing the rapid changes in the lady's countenance, felt forced to say in his heart, "She loves me!" And this went much in the way of provoking a reciprocity of feeling

in the chivalrous nature of the descendant of the princes and chiefs of Pendragon Mohr.

Madame de la Mazurka was very deeply but silently exasperated at the coldness of her uncle's greeting. "It was the reception of a were-wolf!" she said afterwards, writing to a particular friend in Paris, who was not a female one, but who liked gossiping. "And I will never forgive it to my uncle; and to my sister, who is doubtless the original provocation of it! There are some men, it is truly remarked, whose benefits produce all the effects of injuries, from their detestable manner of conferring them. My uncle is one of those men. But I was only the more determined, on that account, to open his eyes to my sister's deception and ridiculous attempts at captivation of the stiff-necked widower, who had shown himself, on his part, a perfect misogynist, and incapable of appreciating the pleasures of cultivated female society."

However, the Countess was destined to perceive that her slighting cavalier and repelling uncle got on amazingly well together from the very first, speedily discerning in one another the

characteristics of the high-bred and intellectual gentlemen they both were in a most eminent degree. Mr. Featherstone, indeed, seemed in the greatest measure satisfied with all he observed about his guest, and the awkwardness of a first meeting was got over between them so fast, that in a few minutes they seemed as if they had known each other all their lives, and were talking of men, and books, and politics, and agriculture, and field-sports, as pleasantly and sociably as if they had sat for years at the same quarter-sessions. And in all this Miss Clanbrassey was nearly as well qualified as either gentleman to shine, and took a part in the conversation which produced, in still more striking points of view, the really extensive and powerful range of her acquirements. The poor flippancies of the Countess showed to miserable disadvantage in a company composed of persons of so much higher range of intellect, and she speedily found herself condemned to total silence, or to impertinent interruptions, which were received with so little favour that she herself grew after awhile disinclined to make

them, and sank into a peevish and disconcerted quietude.

Even the somewhat frugal and unimposing style of housekeeping observed at Featherstone Hall was in accordance with the tastes of Mr. Pendragon, and tallied well with his plans of retrenchment and economy, until returning opulence should allow him to restore Pendragon Castle to its ancient splendours of hospitality and free-living at the domestic board. Everything that was placed before him was, however, excellent of its kind, and attested the vigilant superintendence of the mistress of the establishment, and the gentlemanly tastes and habits of the master. In short, there might have been some truth in the Countess's malignant observations at a subsequent period, that Mr. Pendragon was in search of a housekeeper, governess, duenna, and Blue Book epitome, when he proposed to her sister Rosanna! But whatever might have been the dominant impulses with the suitor himself, the wild and stormy romance of the feelings he aroused remained unaltered in that strangely-passioned

woman's heart, and produced the most startling results.

It was a pleasant day for the congenial part of the company, Mr. Pendragon being further well-pleased to discern that although his attentions to Mr. Featherstone's niece were marked, and much beyond what were her simple dues as hostess, the Squire himself in nowise answered the description he had received of his aversion to all views of matrimony on her account. On the contrary, a manœuvring mother could scarcely have gone beyond this good uncle in his exertions to forward anything of the kind that might be in embryo. He was lavish in his praise of his niece in all her range of capacities, and took pains in drawing her out on the subjects he knew she was likely most to shine in. The truth is, the worthy Squire was much taken with Mr. Pendragon's manners and conversation, and relieved of more disquieting apprehensions that any possible equal suitorage of the kind could have awakened in his breast, at any time. He was also surprised at Rosanna's success in engaging the affections and interest of so distinguished a person, and almost took a

kind of pride to himself on the subject, as if it was a triumph of his own original plans for her happy settlement in life.

Under these circumstances the Squire even condescended so far to soften his asperities against the Marrynetts, that—when Mr. Pendragon consulted him with no little anxiety, as to his opinion of the steps he had taken with his mining property—Mr. Featherstone answered in general terms, that if the head of that Liverpool firm had taken his concerns in hand, nothing that capital and business qualities could achieve, would be found wanting. He dissembled also (for perhaps the first time in his life) his little acquaintance with a science in which he was supposed to be an adept, and pretended to listen with understanding and conviction to his guest's elucidations of the strata and geological formation of his mountains, which proved so clearly their boundless undeveloped wealth. And after lunch he proposed a walk on the estate, in which Miss Clanbrassey necessarily became the immediate companion of his gentleman visitor, while he himself, much to his discomfiture, became the property of the Countess.

Of course Madame de la Mazurka would not lose her opportunities. She was already again almost as tired of Featherstone as she had been in her youth, and was considering the next most annoying thing she could do would be to declare she must return to Liverpool, when she made certain Mr. Pendragon would be forced to accompany her. She had, therefore, no great time to lose, and purposely slackened her pace to oblige her uncle to linger at some distance in the rear. But he rather favoured the manœuvre. She made use of her first opportunities then to thank her uncle with some artificial—could they have been natural in her?—tears, for all his goodness to her: for the allowance which had enabled her to live—not in affluence, not in luxury, it is true—but in peace and comfort abroad. She laid a particular stress on the word—imagining that it might lead to some overture to increase the stipend, on the Squire's part, in expensive England. But she found it only elicited from him an inquiry, if she thought she should still need the three hundred a year now her brother, the Colonel, was returning to set up a house and home for her? To which

she vehemently replied, that she had not the slightest reliance whatever on any provision so very selfish a man as Kilpatrick Clanbrassey had always shown himself to be, would make for her, or any one he was not absolutely obliged to do it for. And irritated at so inconsiderate a suggestion, which she ascribed to Rosanna's trickery, to keep the whole "plunder of her uncle" to herself, she thought she was giving her a telling tit-for-tat when she resumed, by remarking to Mr. Featherstone—"I should return with a thousand times more joy to your own cherished roof, dear uncle, which so many years of exile have endeared to me hourly more and more, in association with the charming recollections of departed youth and its pleasures! And if all that I observed in Liverpool—if all that I do not doubt has already occurred to your penetration—should come to the natural results, you will lose the affectionate companion of so many happy years, in the person of my beloved sister; and when she is happily established with the husband so evidently of her choice at Pendragon Castle, you will need some substitute for what you have lost, and will

permit me doubtless to fill up the void left on your hearth by Rosanna's following in the footsteps of her elder sisters—under happier auspices, I trust, and your more direct approbation!"

"Hold your foolish tongue, Philippina! You are talking of what has probably no existence but in your own flighty brain!" Mr. Featherstone replied, with a sudden sharpness, and resumption of his earlier habits of irascible control, which almost gratified the mischievous Countess with the notion that her ill-meant hint had produced its proper effect. But at the same moment the shadow of a mean-looking man, partly wrapped in an old plaid, and carrying a kind of wallet on a stick over his shoulder,—indeed, shabby as a beggar in his attire—passed before them; and the Squire, suddenly halting, turned and faced his unpleasant bailiff, who was coming with singular closeness on their heels.

By some chance—though Mr. Featherstone himself had suggested a visit to his moors, to estimate the promise of the then nigh-at-hand grouse-shooting — the company were now on their way towards the boggy tract of country

called "The Moss." They were on a narrow sandy roadway, running through a maze of furze and fern, on a high reach of hilly land which overlooked the dreary and extensive expanse in question towards the sea. It looked all the drearier, perhaps, for the bright down-shining of the sun overhead, and the beautiful blue gleaming of the waters beyond. Miss Clanbrassey and Mr. Pendragon were considerably ahead of the other two, on a knoll shaded by a few remarkable Scotch firs, of the blackest-hued green, which advanced like a promontory over a deep chasm of rock and sandstone, separating the elevated land from the swamp. Even from this point only a remote view of "Hang-Dog Hut" could be caught; but it was a truly mournful and desolate-looking abode for a human habitation, thatched almost to the ground, and perched like a sentry-box on an opposite point of view towards the sea, in the midst of a tangle of pools and peat-diggings which it seemed difficult to traverse without an occasional immersion, no one could tell how deep, in the black slush and drainage. A few starved and discoloured-looking sheep were, however, feeding, scattered

over this waste,—nibbling, with little gratification to appetite, at its scant oases of coarse grass and rushes, and brambly fern.

It seemed natural enough, therefore, that Bailiff Blackmore should be retracing his way from an excursion to the Hall Farm along this rough path. What surprised and annoyed Mr. Featherstone so particularly was the stealthy manner of his approach, which must have enabled him to hear much of the foolish Countess's remarks on Rosanna's prospects. Or if he had not noticed on whom he was intruding so closely, there was something still more annoying in the absorbed attention the bailiff must have been devoting to the foremost pair, to stumble thus upon a personage whom he was not likely wilfully to seek to come across.

His irritable temper kindled by these conjoint causes, Mr. Featherstone angrily exclaimed, "Upon my word! is that you, Mr. Blackmore? You seem soon recovered from your attack! But why do you not give yourself a holiday in Scotland, as I particularly requested you should, while your system of management, and—and

your accounts (!) are competently examined? For I am not in the least satisfied with either myself, I assure you, however plausibly you may represent things to my niece—and I tell you so personally, that there may be no mistake about the matter! No mistake at all! As for that hovel, where I am informed you have taken up your residence so much against my will, I am certain it is not fit for human habitation, and I hope you are not going to demonstrate your conviction that you are of any inferior order of animal by persisting in remaining there?"

Much to Mr. Featherstone's surprise, perhaps a little to his alarm, the bailiff answered this sufficiently insulting interrogatory in tones of defiance and asperity not to be mistaken!—with a flash in his usually dull, nondescript eyes, also, and a most unusually firm and determined look.

"I am the best judge, Mr. Featherstone!" he replied, "of my own wants and requirements; and whether I am a creature of the brute creation or not, and as such content to housel me with the wretchedest and least cared-for of my kind, that is my affair. Yours is to know that I

prefer this hovel, as you style it, to a king's palace, inasmuch as it is my own so long as I pay the rent and dues for the same to the manor of Featherstone; under your own hand and seal, while you are a living man! You can't grant leases, anybody knows, longer. But for that time that hovel is mine; these bogs are mine; these sheep are mine, as much as the little sack of oatmeal on my back, which I have been to buy—not steal, mark you—at the Hall, for crowdies and hasty-pudding; which, with a chance crow or two, is good enow fare for me while I am looking after my property hereabouts, if even you are pleased to give me a sax month notish to take no further tent of anything of yours!"

"I do—from this moment—Philippina, you are my witness! I discharge this man, Blackmore, from any office or business on my estates and properties, of every kind, from this hour henceforth! Claim your six months' wages as soon as you will; I shall know where to lay my hand on sixty pounds; and if you have any self-respect, evacuate the rest of my property as speedily as you can, and claim any reasonable

indemnification for loss or inconvenience you may consider yourself put to !" said Mr. Featherstone, turning quite white with passion.

" Hear me, then, in my turn, Mr. Featherstone, and let this chatty French lady be my witness, too ! I will remain on this ground—at yonder hovel—from this time forward till doomsday—at least your doomsday, Squire Featherstone ! And nothing shall ever induce me to leave it ; no threats, no discomforts, no violence even, unless it deprives me of existence also—and it is Murder still, Mr. Featherstone !—murder even for so great a gentleman to slay so poor an offscum of creation as Abednego Blackmore ! No threats, no discomforts, no violence, I say, shall drive me hence unless your niece, Squire Featherstone ! — unless your niece, Rosanna Clanbrassey—accompanies me hence as my wedded wife ! When I will go with her wheresoever she bids me—to the utmost ends of the earth, if it must be, out of your tyrannous sight."

" Grand Dieu ! qu'entends-je !" exclaimed Madame de la Mazurka, really and truly frightened completely out of her wits, and into the

French language, which had become more natural to her than her own.

"No matter: the man is a madman—an opium-eater—a perfect madman!" returned Mr. Featherstone, growing absolutely bloodless in the face, and seeming ready to fall down in a fit, or else to spring on the audacious speaker like a fierce and hungry tiger on a wild boar. But he did neither; he only drew the Countess onward with a hurried gesture, exclaiming, "Rosanna told me of this! It is worse many times than the intoxication of drink. But we must hit upon some means to get rid of so singular a lunatic very quietly. Come on, senseless woman! What are you stopping for? After disgracing the family so atrociously yourself—I say—what are you stopping for? Come on!"

"Where has the—the—madman gone?" exclaimed the Countess, staring back with a frightened look, as she complied with her uncle's passionate movement of advance. "I don't see him anywhere! Can the ground have swallowed him up?"

"I wish it had! But there are plenty of by-paths and clefts in the sandstone, covered by the

furze and brambles, which anyone familiar with the country can easily plunge into. Don't look so agitated, Philippina! on pain of your income! I don't want Mr. Pendragon to form the least notion how doltishly I have allowed my niece to be scoundrelled over by this Scotch rascal into as good as depriving me of the ownership of my land, and the right of kicking such a villanous scamp off it to John o' Groat's! Look calm, I say, or I will never forgive you, and leave the provision I meant for you in my will to found a hospital for lap-dogs! Look calm, look calm, I say!"

"Set me the example, uncle, and then—— Let us sit down for a few moments and recover ourselves! Mr. Pendragon and Rosanna, from the close way they seem talking now, will not miss us readily. You seem ready to sink, and so, I am sure, am I!"

The Squire, really feeling very ill, and, so to speak, topsy-turvied in all his ideas, complied with the request, and thus afforded further time for Destiny to proceed in her work.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ILL-OMENED BETROTHAL.

THERE must have been a fatality in it! And it was almost as if one's eyes could have seen the inevitable goddess of ancient mythology lashing on the general movement of the catastrophe, in what came to pass that memorable noonday on the cliffy heights overlooking Featherstone Moss. Mr. Pendragon actually proposed, then and there, to Rosanna Clanbrassey!

How it came about he himself would not have found it easy to declare, at any subsequent interval of cool reflection.

Mr. Pendragon had certainly lunched well, and had taken a glass or two of the finest old East India Madeira he ever remembered to have

tasted, from the antique cellar-bins of his host. He was in good spirits with the conviction, agreeably enforced upon him, that he had not embarked his fortunes, and the fortunes of a rising generation of young men and women, the children of his beloved Isa Helena, in a scheme which must be followed by their rise or downfall, with mere intriguing money-adventurers and speculators. That honourable country gentleman, Mr. Featherstone, acknowledged his connexion with the Marrynetts—spoke favourably of their influence in affairs. A woman who most plainly worshipped his every glance—a woman of great intellect, of station, of matured experience—showed in every way she decently could, that she appreciated and was anxiously desirous to forward the declaration of sentiments that his previous demeanour, he knew and felt, had indicated to exist.

Even the degree of apprehension—of vague, unknown terror, which seemed to pervade Rosanna's approach to the verge of the great mystery of existence revealed by the consentaneous action of two hearts in different physical organizations—strangely stimulated Mr. Pen-

dragon's wishes to solve what had now become a remarkable problem — a riddle — to him. Plain acceptance—plain encouragement—of his pretensions would perhaps have caused him to abandon them in disgust. But there was something about this strong-minded woman's welcoming—and shrinking repugnance—to his address, which presented to Mr. Pendragon all the eager interest of a well-contrived third volume of a romance, which concentres the previous elements of interest, and leaves the solution almost to the final word.

He saw—or believed he saw—that the Squire of Featherstone and his Frenchified niece purposely lingered behind, and left the field clear for his operations.

Rosanna meanwhile had been speaking with so much sense and originality, on the characteristics of the country they were traversing, and inquiring with so much interest into the distinctions offered by the mountainous scenery of Wales, that Mr. Pendragon felt more and more every moment, how invaluable such a companion would be in the secluded and remote life which he henceforth proposed to lead.

The bright, keen air of the upland, in association with the vegetable gases effused from the waste below, affected him perhaps with something of intoxicating and subduing fragrancy. And to this was added a strangely attractive, wild sense of incongruity—of flying in the face of all that could be expected from him—of reversal of his past—as he gazed upon the osseous framework, and the brown, deep-featured, torrent-traced (as it were) visage, of the powerful woman who walked beside him!

Mr. Pendragon quite trembled as he gained the summit of that advancing promontory of sand, and heath, and furze, with Miss Clanbrassey by his side, and heard her observe—

"How strange! we have left uncle and my sister really out of sight! Can they have turned into one of the clefts, and intend to emerge on the Moss below?"

"It is a wild—rather a gloomy scene!" said Mr. Pendragon.

"I like it all the better for that. Is not Wales wild and gloomy, too, Mr. Pendragon, where you reside?"

"I do not think, in any part, so very melancholy and sombre as this scene. It seems almost to prompt something wild and terrible in human destiny!—some strange, improbable complication. Has nothing of the kind ever happened here? For my part, I believe the Romans conquered the world through the Pontine marshes! The gases from them filled their heads with the illusions of glory and conquest."

"Are glory and conquest illusions, Mr. Pendragon? Visions seem to me the only realities of life, in that case!" Rosanna replied, with emotion. "But do the exhalations of these marshes put anything out-of-the-way of the sort in so steady a head as yours, who think only of mines in your mountains?"

"I should be sorry—very sorry—if I thought the fancies that possess me now were altogether illusions, Miss Clanbrassey. . . Your uncle seems to me one of the kindest as well as most sagacious and appreciative of men!" remarked Mr. Pendragon, curiously enough, in reply.

"He is all that, and a good deal more."

"He seems to desire your happiness above everything."

"His whole life has shown that he does so. He has sacrificed it to his sister's family—to us all! We have hitherto but ill-repaid him. He is the most generous of men. He desires nothing, as you say, Mr. Pendragon, but my happiness."

There was a pause.

"And do you think, Miss Clanbrassey—do you think, dear Rosanna! you could find it in the arms of a husband who—as a lover—looks upon you now with the deepest approval—love—appreciation—and who is irresistibly led to the conclusion that God has deferred the opening of your heart and affections to make him for ever blessed and happy in them, and console him for all the sorrows and fearful chasms that have yawned in his existence?"

Rosanna was silent—absolutely choked and breathless with the intensity of her emotions. One instant of ecstatic happiness was granted to this unfortunate woman in the long, painful struggle of her life, and she enjoyed for an in-

stant a passing glance into paradise, and a view of all its effulgence and its sweets.

She had no power to hinder herself from replying then. "I have loved you since I was created, I am sure, Mr. Pendragon; though I have only known you for a few days. Whatever would make your happiness would make mine!"

"With you for my wife, I should have an additional joy for every fortunate chance of life —an antidote for every grief and weariness in your affection and society! Will you be mine, dearest Miss Clanbrassey? and may I ask your uncle's permission to make you so before all the world?"

Need the answer be repeated—the passionate, bewildered acceptance of the offer, which only a sense of the exposed situation in which they stood, prevented Mr. Pendragon from sealing with the lover's embrace? As it was, Miss Clanbrassey and her accepted suitor merely joined hands, and held them for several instants closely clasped, in a silent trance of mutual love and trust.

What was it that on a sudden, then, induced

Rosanna to withdraw hers from that loving pressure, and to gaze from the kind and trustful eyes thus fixed upon her?

In the distance, shelving down among the darksome descents of the bog, the figure of a man appeared; wallowing, as it seemed, rather than proceeding in any human gait, among the miry abysses in the direction of "Hang-dog Hut." But the now westering sun gleaming full on its visage showed that it was upturned with earnest scrutiny towards the spot where these two stood. A curiously white and contorted visage it was, too!

"What is the matter, dear Miss Clanbrassey? Why do you seem so alarmed?" inquired the now declared lover, with some share in the emotion.

"Nothing—it is such a talking, scandalous place, this village of ours! And yonder man seems to me like a person who is—who is my uncle's bailiff—and whose gossiping propensities may be set afloat, seeing us standing thus, hand in hand, dearest Mr. Pendragon!" was Rosanna's shuddering reply, relinquishing her grasp with an effort. "And here come my uncle and

Madame de la Mazurka! Do not look displeased, in God's name, I beseech you! If you have my dear uncle's consent, you have mine!"

CHAPTER VII.

A DECISIVE INTERVIEW.

MR. FEATHERSTONE and the Countess, in fact, came up precisely at the moment Rosanna Clanbrassey took that desperate consenting step with Destiny, and declared her willingness to become the wife of the speculative chieftain of Pendragon Mohr. And the arrival, perhaps, a little accounted for her confusion. Not altogether; as Mr. Pendragon's still wondering gaze declared.

"Rosanna, dear! I think we had better be *making home!*" said the Countess, now in very good Lancashire. "Uncle don't feel well!"

The Countess herself did not look very particularly so. Indeed, very much the reverse. And, for once in a way, there was nothing

either of satire or coquetry in the words which she addressed to the pair, whose situation and embarrassed manner seemed to authorize a good display of those charming characteristics so frequently brought by her into play.

"Nonsense, nonsense, Philippina! I am quite well again. It was only momentary—walking so soon on a meal—I ought not to have eaten so much of that potted char!" said Mr. Featherstone, rather disjointedly. "Not that I am much of an invalid, Mr. Pendragon, on the march; as I hope to let you see on the 12th. For I trust you will stay with us a week or fortnight into the grouse-shooting, when you shall comprehend of what I am capable, gun in hand, on these mosses here."

"My dearest uncle! but I cannot delay at Featherstone, however much I should wish—cannot detain Mrs. Marrynett's family equipage; and, besides, I have made arrangements that will oblige me to be in town, even at so unfashionable a season, in a few days, to prepare everything for my brother's reception in the house I have taken for him."

So Madame the Countess interposed with

haste, seeming to infer thereby that Mr. Pendragon could not accept the invitation given him, but must take his departure in her train.

"I shall be most happy, Mr. Featherstone, to show you I have some skill also, even at such shy game as yours appears to be. I accept your invitation with the greatest pleasure!" Mr. Pendragon said, without in the least appearing to consider himself included in the Countess's refusal.

This did not greatly please her, it may be thought, after the efforts she had made to win upon the Welsh gentleman's attention personally. She felt assured, also, when she came to look more calmly at the pair, that something unusual had happened between them. Were they going to make a match of it; a happy, well-assorted match of it?

Like a good many other people who have made failures themselves, Madame de la Mazurka was no very sincere admirer of the successes of her contemporaries. She liked making matches, perhaps, but she did not care much that they should be happy ones. Somewhat on this principle she had spoilt Tom Souchong's

chances with his Beauty; but, to be sure, she had other reasons, too, for doing this. At all events, the Countess determined that Rosanna should not remain ignorant of her bailiff's impertinence.

She did her sister a service, however, without intending it, by the prompt measures she took to that effect.

When the party returned to the Hall, and the ladies had retired to dress for dinner in Miss Clanbrassey's apartment, the affectionate Philippina fell to work at once, congratulating her sister on the immense improvement visible in her style of "decoration" since she had been at Liverpool, even though she still kept no "woman" about her to attend to her toilette. So much taken up as she must be with business affairs!

"I declare it almost seems to me, in consequence, as if you had completed your conquest of the Welshman!" she continued, so pleasantly! "Nothing but the blindness of love can prevent him from perceiving that he offers me almost an insult, in leaving me to return alone, after having undertaken my escort into this wild por-

tion of the world. But I forgive him if that is the case. It is time you were married, Rosanna, indeed, if you ever are to be! And particularly after that mad bailiff of yours has had the audacity to make the declaration I heard him utter with my own ears, to uncle himself; by which he really seemed to infer you had remained so long on the market, that even tinkers like him had a right to price the article."

Rosanna certainly looked almost as uncomfortable as a real and well-founded jealousy—instead of the vague ill-feeling that inspired her sister—could reasonably have desired. But when she liked, she could exercise a most extraordinary control over the externals of emotion.

"What do you mean, dear?" she inquired, quite carelessly. "But you are right about the improvement dress makes! I don't think any woman should neglect it so much as I have; but in this lonesome village, with only one's uncle to see one—How different you would look, for example, if you did not dress so beautifully! I declare I was quite shocked that morning when I came into your room before you had

made yourself up for visitors!—But what did this worthy chapman say? Had you some gossip with him while we were looking at the prospect from Lone Fir Scaur?"

"A good deal: uncle will tell you the business part, most likely; but I heard your bailiff say, myself, that he would never leave the wretched hut where he has taken up his abode on my uncle's estate, against his will, until you left it with him as his bride! What could the miserable fellow mean by that, Rosanna?"

"What could the miserable fellow mean by that, Philippina!" repeated Miss Clanbrassey, after a slight pause, and in a strange undertone, which sounded rather as if addressed to herself —and to a separated self—than to her hearer. "Why! that he never meant to leave it at all —alive! When people say, if the sky fall they shall catch larks, they mean much the same. Blackmore knew that nothing could be more impossible than that Mr. Featherstone's niece should ever become his 'bride,' as you call it; that my uncle thought so; and that he could not more clearly point out to him his determination to remain on his estate—on the part where

he has taken the land on a life-term—whether he likes it or not!"

"I am glad you explain things so, dear; and, in fact, from uncle's manner of receiving the bare notion, even used to illustrate an impossibility, I am quite certain anything resembling a reality of the sort would kill him outright. You can scarcely conceive how white he turned —you've seen chalk busts, haven't you? But this is assuredly not your game, considered in any point of interest, either for yourself or any of us, as the estate is so dreadfully entailed, and only worth what it is to us as long as uncle lives!"

"Don't be afraid! I shall not kill the best, and kindest, and most generous of all mankind to make myself the 'bride' of the worst, cruellest, and meanest," returned Rosanna. "I would rather—a thousand times, my dear Phillippina!—kill—myself!"

"I am sure I should not hurt a hair of my own head for anything or anybody in the entire world!" said the Countess with a shudder at the bare idea of such an atrocity. "Don't make one ill, Rosanna!—just before dinner, too!

All I meant you to consider is, that it would quite ruin you with Mr. Pendragon, if he should ever get to hear even the ravings of a madman in this style. The wife of Cæsar, I suspect, must not be brought into question, even if perfectly innocent—as, no doubt, you are—of ever having encouraged ideas so preposterous."

"I will take care Blackmore's audacity never intrudes itself upon Mr. Pendragon!" replied Rosanna, turning far paler than she had yet done through this dialogue, although she had often changed colour. And, after all this, still she could not deny herself the woman's triumph and refutation of adding: "I think it is not very likely I shall contribute in any manner to the annoyance of a gentleman of Mr. Pendragon's position, who, on so short an acquaintance, has conceived regard enough for me to offer me marriage!"

"Already!"

"Already."

"Grand Dieu! Of course, then, you have accepted it? your whole manner has indicated as much from the very first of your introduction at Marrynett's. Everybody remarked it; and

even some people thought you had been a long time engaged. Insomuch that I really begin to think the true art of getting a man, is to let him see you want him! Our grandmothers used not to think so. My dear, I can't congratulate you on having secured a very agreeable, sociable, witty, or wealthy parti—or, even, a man with a disengaged heart, for this Welshman never speaks but he alludes in some way to his late wife, or her tombstone! But it is better, perhaps, than dying a perfect old maid, grizzled up here with uncle, whose temper appears to me more uncertain and despotic than ever. Or made the subject of insane speculation with farm-servants and labourers!"

These remarks were not deeply gratifying; but I am not sure that Rosanna attended much to them. The fond French embrace that concluded the harangue seemed, in fact, quite to startle her.

"What is the matter?" she inquired; and then seemed to apprehend what was meant, and laughed!—a quaint, unreal, mocking sort of laugh it was, that quickly subsided. Doubtless then she felt sorry that she had thus taken

another deep step in compromising herself with the opinion of society. For she knew that Philippina would make no secret of what she had revealed to her; and not to marry Mr. Pendragon now would be to make herself the butt of confirmed suspicion and report with that other detested underling!

She continued, as Madame de la Mazurka specially noticed, even more than usually silent and moodily thoughtful during the remainder of the toilette. But undoubtedly what she had heard prepared her better for explanations with her uncle, which his impatient character, and the grievous anxiety awakened in his mind, compelled him to require at once; so very inopportunely, indeed, that it was precisely as Miss Clanbrassey was descending to ascertain that all was going well for the dinner with her terrified country cooks, when the Squire darted out of his study upon her, and requested her to walk in for a couple of moments and tell him what, in the name of all that was wonderful, that d——d beast Blackmore could mean by——.

Here he slammed the door upon himself and his niece, and proceeded—scarcely coherently

indeed, had not Rosanna been made previously perfectly well aware of what she was to expect —to relate the circumstances of his interview with Bailiff Blackmore, and the extraordinary threat and expression he had used in declaring his determination not to relinquish his hold on the property, and possession of its outlying dependency.

"What is the meaning of this fellow mixing himself up, with such audacity and determination, in our affairs? I insist upon knowing it! Tell me the worst at once! It would be death to me, indeed, to think it possible that——But I am accustomed to the vilest ingratitude—the cruellest misconduct—on the part of the members of your family, Miss Clanbrassey, and ——."

"My dear uncle," interrupted Rosanna, with a really frightful calmness, in contrast with her uncle's vehemence, "what strange ideas you seem to form at once, and reason upon as if they were facts! Am I responsible for the delusions a madman may have formed?"

"Blackmore is not a madman, Rosanna! there is too much method in his madness for it

to be genuine! He seemed perfectly well aware of what he was saying and doing, and looked so devilishly triumphant when he uttered the defiance, that I could not but be seized with a notion that——."

"That all the trouble and care, and instruction and wisdom, you have devoted for so many years to my benefit, have only produced a worse combination than all the duplicity and recklessness of my brothers and sisters put together! A hybrid man in all that is evil in both sexes—none of the good! And so great a fool, in fine, that with my eyes open I have chosen to degrade myself and you, and every one, down to the level of a mean, ugly, low-minded, wretched poverty-stricken huckster like your late bailiff, by encouraging hopes in him of the kind you seem to think I have! While, to complete and crown the whole marvellous indiscretion and treason of my conduct, I have invited the attentions—accepted an offer of marriage from a gentleman whose high-toned sense of honour, and punctilious decorum in all that relates to the female sex, you cannot have failed to appreciate—since, dear uncle! you are only another

Mr. Pendragon in all your sentiments and ideas on the subject!" Rosanna said.

"You have received an offer of marriage from Mr. Pendragon, and you have accepted it!" exclaimed Mr. Featherstone.

"And precisely at the moment when this madman was naming the impossible condition of getting rid of him, which your imagination has distorted into a powerful threat!"

Mr. Featherstone was not in the least offended by the superior and rebuking tone assumed by his niece.

"Thank God! my good God be thanked for ever for his mercy! You take a mountain from my heart, Anna dearest! But why, if the man is mad, why does he seem so thoroughly in possession of his senses in all that seems to relate to his own interests—mad, only, on some points, and by fits and starts?" said Mr. Featherstone, brightening up visibly, and yet with strong shades of suspicion wavering over his discourse.

"Have I not told you, sir, that Blackmore's lunacy is chiefly the product of the pernicious drug in which he indulges to an incredible

excess? Of course he is subject to his hallucinations in proportion to the quantity of intoxicating ingredient at the moment in his composition. Most likely he indulges in his luxury now more than ever, in his vexation at his disgrace and turning out at the place here!"

"But how came you to be—to be so much in a servant-fellow's confidence, Miss Clanbrassey! as to be aware of all this explanation of the strange conduct of the man?"

"He suggested opium to me, as a remedy of whose efficacy and harmlessness he had made many years' probation, for the pain in my heart," replied Miss Clanbrassey, dauntlessly, but somewhat heedlessly, too, for she added—"But I found out to the contrary, when I consulted the medical men in Birmingham, that it was more likely to be the cause of it, by increasing my tendency to indigestion. They gave me something instead, which has already almost cured me."

"In Birmingham! Medical men in Birmingham!" repeated Mr. Featherstone, staring at his niece.

"Liverpool, I meant to say! Did I say

Birmingham? I thought, indeed, at one time, of going there, on the recommendation of Mrs. Marrynett, who—no, it was at Leamington she was confined! I mean there is a doctor there the Liverpool ladies think immensely of—partly because he resides in such pleasant quarters to be consulted at, no doubt! But you may depend upon all I say, my dear uncle, in the matter—and I have given Mr. Pendragon permission to ask your consent to our union as soon as he can find a proper opportunity."

"God be praised! God be praised! He shall find it this very afternoon, if he pleases! —I never did understand women, and I never shall. So I have grown to desire even your transference to the custody of some one who is better endowed with intellectual faculty in that respect than myself, Rosanna! But beware that you are not entangling me also in any dishonourable complication in this affair —that you are not attempting to deceive this noble and true-hearted gentleman, who must have overlooked so many deficiencies, in the way of softness and tenderness of the female character, in you—Nay, Anna dear! don't look

so—I mean no reflections. What you are I have myself made you. I only meant to say that I could not—that I would not—survive the shame and anguish of discovering that my favourite niece, reared in my precepts—the companion of so many happy—or, if not happy, tranquil years of my life—that you, Rosanna, should stand forward to disgrace me and my system to the world more effectually than all the rest of your brothers and sisters have ever disgraced the world and its maxims, by which alone they have guided themselves! Oh, Rosanna, you would break my heart—crush it utterly—and reward all my love and kindness for you with the saddest doom ever man received from the mortal enemy he had done the most to injure and betray!"

"My dear uncle! you allow yourself to be too much moved by mere creations of your fancy.—Mr. Pendragon will begin to think we are a very strange lot, and perhaps Susan will allow the salmon to be overboiled—I had better go and see after things at once, I think! But we will try and get rid of this man, who gives you so much uneasiness; I think I know a

way. Indeed, it is perfectly plain what Blackmore is working at—like a greedy, grasping Scot as he is. He wants us to buy him out at some handsome rate. Well, I will see him, and try and find out what he requires. But I will submit to no extortion, uncle, and I will demand of him what he can have the audacity to mean by making such observations on me; and if he does not make the amplest apology, you will have a perfect right, sir, as my nearest protector so far, and a gentleman whose dignity is insulted by such insolence, to have him ducked, asthma and all, in any of the filthy pools in the Moss, and kicked off the estate immediately afterwards, as he thoroughly deserves!"

"Do this, Rosanna! do it fearlessly, and I —for one—shall be perfectly satisfied again," returned Mr. Featherstone.

"Let us have no scenes, however, if possible, at the House. I can easily make some pretence to go and see the fellow at his hut!"

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Featherstone: and the sallow cheek of Rosanna caught fire as she suddenly recollected that frequently as she might have been out there with the bailiff, it was in

times of their unsuspected relations, when they were supposed to be in deep cogitation on the ways and means of draining the Moss—anything but love-making!

"I am always forgetting that I am not a man!" she replied, after an embarrassed pause. "However, I almost think I am man enough for that fellow, if he dared dream of offering me any insult. Let us not annoy ourselves more at present, uncle! You really must try and rally your spirits, or Mr. Pendragon will begin to think that I have communicated his proposal, and that you do not relish it. Phippina has already made him believe you are a complete marriage-hater, and devoted only to your own pleasure and convenience in detaining your relatives—the female ones especially—about you."

"I will soon let Mr. Pendragon comprehend far differently," said Mr. Featherstone, with energy. "Only send me a glass of brandy at once, my dear girl! I feel so unaccountably chilled and depressed that I could almost fancy I was like one of those bewitched persons of old, who used to find their vitality withdrawn

as if by an air-pump, while the fiendish wretches were at work melting their waxen effigies!"

And now, as Mr. Featherstone, on reflection, and with the aid of the generous spirit, began to conceive that he had entertained altogether an absurd suspicion—and sincerely desired to promote the event which would most assuredly relieve him from it for ever—he did indeed, return to the duties of his office as host, with a cheerful geniality well adapted to dissipate any cloud that might else have arisen in Mr. Pendragon's mind. To be sure this cloud would only have been the condensing of those light vapours raised by the Countess's intimations of her uncle's selfish wish to keep his niece to himself, and hinder her from forming any connexion likely to remove her from his own service and obedience. Mr. Pendragon could scarcely be said as yet to be aware of the existence of his rival: much less could the haughty Welsh gentleman conceive for a moment the existence of a rival in the person of a mean underling, who took the wages of his betrothed's uncle in the capacity of little better than a domestic. But

he was none the less pleased to find that the only apprehension he could entertain was unlikely to be realized; and that, while he felt almost assured Rosanna had communicated the purport of his recent interview with her, the cordiality, respect, and general benignancy of Mr. Featherstone's manner, had rather in all respects increased than diminished.

Rosanna's own demeanour was singularly appropriate to the circumstances under which her uncle and lover were at liberty to suppose her placed. She was calm and quiet; even more than was usually the case with her; while a kind of brightness of some deep inner joy seemed to beam through her whole frame and irradiate it, like the sunshine through some medium only in part too dense to be pierced by the beam.

Madame de la Mazurka was the sole person who did not appear very greatly to relish the state of things. She ate well, but seemed uneasy and out of place, and willing to relieve the company of her presence as soon as possible. Almost as soon as dinner and a slight dessert were over, she looked at her watch, and declared

she must not delay her departure until it was dark. Mr. Marrynett would be alarmed about his horses—they were such valuable horses! But had not Mr. Pendragon better accompany her back to Liverpool, until that mad, muttering fellow at Hang-Dog Hut was banished the place, as her uncle proposed? Really, although a madman, she did not half like——But there she was interrupted by her uncle, who exclaimed, "Why, Philippina, what are you croaking about now?" in a tone that brought her to a standstill. And, perhaps, Mr. Pendragon would have taken little notice of what was said, had not old Dobson just at the moment entered, with an astonished countenance under his powdered wig, exclaiming rather than announcing, as he came in, "Please, sir, Mr. Blackmore insists he must see you! and the young missus! and the strange gentleman here! on legal law business; and 'won't be hindered of his rights,' and so, sir—"

"Is he out there? What the devil can the fellow mean!" exclaimed Mr. Featherstone, starting up in a fit of renewed excitement. "I won't stand his intrusion any longer——What!

forcing himself into my very dining-room and the presence of my guests!"

In truth, the ungainly figure of the bailiff was observed advancing up the corridor leading to the Cedar Parlour, which was the last of a series of handsome apartments on the ground-floor of the mansion. Dobson had inadvertently left the door open behind him.

"Oh, my gracious heavens! it is a madman who fancies he has some sort of right to——," began Madame de la Mazurka, when her sister interrupted her.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Pendragon!" she said, with singular firmness and precision of tone. "It is only one of our tenants, who was formerly our bailiff, and whom my uncle has discharged, but who fancies——"

"Yes; uncle gave him notice to quit this very morning, and called me to witness, when he came upon us at the bog. But take care, Rosanna! If he has illusions at all, they chiefly concern you!" vociferated Madame, at a top screech of her voice.

"I trust we shall be enabled to protect Miss Clanbrassey from the impertinence of a menial,

of whatever degree," said Mr. Pendragon, also rising as if to face a foe.

But Rosanna drew him back with almost a species of violence.

"Do not interfere, Mr. Pendragon," she said. "The man is in reality more than half a madman, and is often in a state of intoxication! But he is best managed by those who understand his peculiarities. Let me speak with him."

As Rosanna thus spoke, Blackmore entered; but not certainly with much the look of a madman, or drunkard either. Rather with a sedate and settled aspect of malice which belonged to a still worse and more pernicious state of mind.

"Good even to you, Squire. Good even, miss. Good even, gentlefolks all! I hope I don't intrude, as the saying is in the London play; but it's of no use in law cases of this kind, unless one sees full and proper service made and rendered, a man's own self. Squire, this paper is for you. This for you, Mr. Pen—Pen—it's spelled right in the document. And this letter's for you, Miss Featherstone! and it's at your own option to hand over the

contents to the use of the company, or no!"

So saying, the bailiff handed two slips of paper, written over in that large, hoof-like hand Madame the Countess had declared characteristic of the agricultural penman—open slips of paper, directed, one to Ferdinand Featherstone, Esquire; the other, to — Pendragon, Esquire; and then he turned from these gentlemen, who mechanically received the documents placed in their hands, to Miss Clanbrassey, and handed her a sealed letter, according to the words he had used.

She took and crushed it with a wild gesture in the palm of her hand; but he said to her in a darkly savage tone, "Read and reply, or I will hand the duplicate one to Mr. Featherstone, and he will know why you refuse."

Meanwhile the two gentlemen, quite amazed, examined their scrolls. And these scrolls proved to be notices, warning them each and both, jointly and severally, from trespassing on the "marishes" or moors known as Featherstone Moss, then and at all future times, saving when, as by ancient custom and right reserved, it was lawful

for the Lords of the Manor of Featherstone, or their assigns, to pursue the wild game called grouse, between the Haugh and the sea, on the reclaimable land occupied by Abednego Blackmore, under a bond of agreement, the exact date of which was given, on the said Manor and Moss of Featherstone.

While the astonished individuals to whom they were addressed perused these missives, Miss Clanbrassey, as if under the spell of an enchanter, opened the letter addressed to her, under the bailiff's imperative gesture. And then she read these awful words: — "Leave the company with me the moment you have read these words, and hear what I have got to say to you on the discovery I have made of the kind of old gentleman geologist, who was to be of so much service to me in the draining of the Moss; or to-morrow with the dawn I set off for Liverpool, to commence an action against you for *breach of promise of marriage*, by demanding a specific performance of your promise verbal, on the oath of my body—Abednego Blackmore."

Mr. Featherstone was so petrified with surprise

and anger, that he could only look at his niece for an explanation, as he placed the document he had received in her hand. He made a gesture at the same moment to take her letter in exchange, but she tore it into a thousand fragments at the instant. As for Mr. Pendragon, his share in the caution was so altogether incomprehensible to him that his mind reverted to Madame de la Mazurka's observation, and he exclaimed—

"Did you allude to anything of this sort—to a madman signing himself Blackmore, Countess! when you advised my immediate return to Liverpool? If so, I must request you to tell me why or wherefore a crazy person, whom I have never seen or heard of in the world before——"

"Nay, my dear sir, this person is not crazy. He only presumes too much on certain rights he imagines he has acquired from a grant of my uncle's respecting the outlying lands in question, and has quarrelled with us for dismissing him from his office as general superintendent," said Miss Clanbrassey, with truly wonderful composure. "But, Mr. Blackmore, since you were here I have discovered the original of the docu-

ment on which you pretend to base your pretensions, and which my uncle's lawyers assure me are essentially unsupported by it. If you will go into my uncle's study for a few moments, I will bring it to you, and convince you on the point—I hope without further trouble and intrusion on my uncle's guests."

"I am willing to listen to reason, Miss, if you can show it," returned the bailiff, drawing his inference his own way. "But the Squire's so peppery, it's no use attempting to talk with him, unless he's allowed to have all his own way, as he showed the morn when I tried to meet him halfway on the dispute between us; which I trust by your means may be brought to an end."

"Shall I go with you, dear? I'll stay to tea now, which I didn't intend to do at first," said the Countess.

"No!" replied Miss Clanbrassey. "You do not understand this kind of man, dear. You would be out of patience at once with their style of argument. Nor my dear uncle either; Mr. Blackmore and I shall come best to an understanding alone," said Rosanna, almost despe-

rately, for in truth she felt she was standing scarcely a hair's-breadth from the edge of the precipice—that a single breath might bring the avalanche down! And she left the room with a strange precipitance, followed at scarcely a respectful distance by Bailiff Blackmore, who, in departing, deigned no ceremonial whatever due to his superiors whom he left behind.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL FOR LOVE.

HOWEVER audaciously Blackmore had exhibited himself of late—and especially in this last act of intrusion—it seemed as if his courage ebbed as he followed Miss Clanbrassey's rapid but singularly soundless steps to the library. He looked and felt like a creature under the direct thrall of destiny; like a criminal, who, apparently unshackled and unconstrained, but aware of an irresistible compelling force at hand, walks of his own accord after the executioner to the place of doom. His expression of fear and anxiety when he had entered the apartment, and knew that his offended leader was about to turn her glance upon him, was at once ludicrous and appalling in a strangely equal degree. And

when Rosanna did look round, the bailiff gave a frightened start which literally made her laugh. At least, the sound she uttered resembled a laugh; though it was as brief and sharp as the clash of steel on steel.

"Close the door, Mr. Blackmore! There's a lamp as usual on uncle's desk—we do not need the staircase light to examine the indenture! You will see it was an useless piece of obstinacy of you to refuse to let me inspect your copy of the agreement, to ascertain whether you had indeed the rights you allege!" Miss Clanbrassey said then, in a loud, distinct tone, intended to reach whoever might be within hearing. But when the shaking bailiff had obeyed orders, and turned again to face her—lividly pale, with his teeth absolutely rattling with nervous agitation in his head—it seemed as if some kind of pity mingled with her anger and contempt. At all events, the asperity of her manner was somewhat qualified, and there was a marked lowering in the tone of her voice, as she said: "What ails you, man! then, that you tremble so? Have you really the grace to be ashamed of your infamous persecution? Or have you not your

unfailing panacea, as usual, in one or the other of those poacher-like pockets? Pray make no stranger of me in that! Take a good sip, and quiet your ague-fit, before we attempt to discuss the extraordinary command you have conveyed to me."

"Not command, Miss Featherstone! Dinna put sic a word between servant and mistress, like as you and I, miss, are! And always should be if even you acknowledged Divine Providence so far as to own me for who I am and ought to be to you, before man as well as God. Mony thanks for the permission, madam! I'll tak' the wee-est sup in the warld of the 'Devil's Black Wine,' as I sometimes ca' it; and yet, whenever I taste of it, it seems as if all the bonny beauty and streaks and freaks of the living poppy flowers, where they bloom nearest the sun, got into the very blood of me, and filled me with their ain brightness and joy! But I'm afraid I'm a'most over-doing it of late, what with heart-sagging and weariness over my griefs and disappointments!"

And Mr. Blackmore drew out of his coat pocket, from the midst of a very miscellaneous

collection certainly—including a hammer, and nails, and pincers, a huge key, and divers pieces of the thin oatmeal cake called "barley-bannock" in Scotland—a short, thick, light green flask; apparently about half full of some dark fluid, doubtless laudanum. Unscrewing the top of this, he took three apparently measured sips, though he used the judgment of experience only for the quantity, and replaced it with a kind of rapturous cluck of the lips, and a deep sigh of relief, as the calming elixir passed into its new receptacle.

Miss Clanbrassey watched the whole movement with a peculiar intensity of observation. Insomuch that Blackmore, though puzzled and doubtful as to the meaning in her fixed but glassy stare, timorously inquired: "But wad ye no like a few drops yersel', miss? Yed luik varra out o' sorts indeed, yersel', most likely wi' leaving it off too suddenly."

Rosanna started as if from a dream.

"No, no," she said, hurriedly passing her hand over her forehead as if to remove some horrid vision from her thoughts. "Keep your poisons to yourself! They have done me harm

enough already—I have taken a kind of oath against it, I told you!——I should like some, too, at bedtime, for I find it impossible to sleep without it—and I have destroyed my phials, and know not how to procure such an article without exciting people's wonder! Don't let's talk any more of that—or of anything else until I am certain no one is listening. I'll pretend just now to go out and look for the agreement about the Moss upstairs, and our copy is in reality in my sleeping room above."

"Well, come noo, Miss Featherstone! I dunnot, for my own part, see the wisdom and needcessity of keeping up all this secrecy and precaution about our affairs any longer. You must have understood as much by the written notish I precognosced to you myself in the parlour below, before witnesses, if you had refused to comply! The truth must and shall be known ae way or t'ither before many days mair whisk ower our heads," Blackmore now replied, with an evident revival of his insolence of fancied control and superiority—due, doubtless, to the influence of his potent drug.

"What do you mean, my good man? Ex-

plain yourself clearly to be understood. You can seat yourself if you like—I must!" And, in truth, in the whirl of thought which now assailed her, Rosanna felt giddy, and flung herself into her uncle's old morocco arm-chair, but yet grimly eyeing her antagonist.

"Na, madam; I ken my place better, as at present advised. No one can tell what additions we may have to the company on the sudden, if the fine folks in the Cedar Parlour should tak' it into their heads I could hae a thought of injury against ane I loo' dearer than life a thousand times! And, indeed, I whiles muse, Miss Featherstone, if you had the means fairly in your way, ye wadna boggle long at murder itsel' to be well rid on me!"

"And yet you claim me as your wife! Would compel me to become so!" Rosanna murmured, in an anguished but very cautious undertone.

"You are my wife, Miss Featherstone! by the most sacred promises—and I will only be robbed of my rights with my life! That is what I wanted to tell you plainly and for the last time. I'm here, I tell you, to demand of you what your southern lawyers ca'—Specific

performance of promise! Will you agree to perform your solemn promise of marriage to me, Miss Featherstone! any named day of this present calendar month—we're close on Grouse-Shooting, nobbet, yet—or no?"

"Speak low or I will not answer you in any form or shape. I will only call for assistance to expel you from the house. But don't fancy anything short of bawling will secure you ear-witnesses to your ravings, for a court of justice, through these massive oak doors!" Rosanna replied, giving a good example in her own voice of the undertone she desired.

"I've witnesses plenty without that, Miss Featherstone! Your uncle and your sister, and saucy old Dobson who let me in—I'll let them and a' the house besides ken what I come about if you provoke me eneugh—and what right I have to uphaud mysel' an injured man, and deprived of my rights! But over and abune a', that grand deer-stalker, geological gentleman, who was to consult with me about the Moss-draining, forsooth, provided only I could be got, by force or fraud, to ship myself off on a seven weeks' journey or so to Scotland, and come

back to find you and he a wedded pair, and obleeged to mak' the best of each other's bygones and little pickydilloes before ye buckled to, for better or for waur!"

"What perfect nonsense you talk, Mr. Blackmore! What can have put such an absurd idea as this into your head?" said Rosanna, feeling every moment more and more inextricably entangled in her fate.

"I hae proofs o't! I overheard the French madam telling your uncle she was quite sure, and it was to be a match between you. And I saw you with my own eyes standing together on the brink of Lone Fir Scaur, clasped hand in hand, like a plighted pair of lovers! That is what has driven me past my patience, Miss Featherstone; and made me resolve to put a stop to your pranks, one way or the other. But I think there can be but one way, if your new Jo is the great-minded gentleman they give him out to be—ay, and he looks it every inch of him—I'll say that for him. When once he has heard the tale that I can tell, and will to him, and all the world besides, unless you prove to me you mean me no false play, by keeping

the word you gave me before you went on this last trip, and marrying me outright!"

Rosanna looked at her threatener, while he thus spoke, with eyes that seemed dilating with the gradual expansion of some frightful, but scarcely comprehensible vision for awhile. There was really a considerable pause of utter silence while she thus gazed. Then it seemed as if some sudden start of resolution and decision came upon her, and woke her up as from a painful trance.

"If such is your resolution, Blackmore—if you are so unreasonably determined on my ruin, as well as your own, as you seem—of course, I must abandon all such expectations as, I acknowledge, you are right in imagining I was looking to as an extrication from the deplorable position in which I am placed. Not that I prefer Mr. Pendragon to you, Blackmore. You were my first love, you know—and you will be my last! But my uncle will certainly never consent to our union; and I am so sick of the life of dependence and misery I lead here, that I have determined to change it, come what may. What you now say decides me. Since you will not suffer me to

become the honoured wife of an equal, I will descend to become yours! Procure the licence to-morrow, if you please. Come, then, openly, to Featherstone with it in your hand, and demand me as your plighted 'bride!' and I will step forward and avow you before all the world, and go with you to wheresoever you will, to hide me from the universal scorn and contempt that will pursue me from the altar, where I make you my husband, to my grave! No matter, I must accept my destiny: as I have made my bed, I must lie upon it! And this, God knows, will be a sufficient answer to the noble gentleman who has in reality asked my consent to speak on the subject you allude to, to my uncle, whom your own outrageous and unaccountable conduct has rendered but too willing to part with me on terms so honourable!"

"But are you really in earnest? Will you keep to what you have said? Will you give me a written promise to that effect?" persisted the cautious Scot.

"Lend me your bottle—spare me a portion of its cordial contents—and it will keep me doubtless in adherence to my word, above all

shame and fear. Yes, I will give you this written guarantee if——. Hush! is not that the sound of something breathing hard outside? Remain here; I will pretend to go upstairs for the copy of the agreement, and I can see if any one is on the way!"

Miss Clanbrassey opened the study door as she spoke, while the bailiff looked at her rather bewilderedly; and he heard her, as she closed it behind her, call out—"Dobson, a candle!" in quite a cheerful and, as it were, triumphant tone.

Blackmore chuckled hugely.

"I've bullied her fairly enough into it now!" he muttered, rubbing his coarse hands together. "And to think what a slippery trick the jade was playing me! She'd as nigh as possible slipped her neck out of the collar. But with this written promise, at last, she dares not venture on her capers with me again; and her uncle, the Grand Turk Squire, will be glad to let fall his threat of examining into my accounts, as it will be a very slight improvement on matters, I should say, to prove his nephew-in-law a defaulter and a rogue!"

Miss Clanbrassey had, meanwhile, received a candle from Dobson, who had been appointed as a sort of intermediate sentinel between the Cedar Parlour and the study, in case any personal need of protection should arise. For, singularly enough, as Mr. Pendragon thought, the Squire declared his niece was far better qualified to carry out a settlement of affairs with her bailiff than himself or anyone else; and he declined interference, and almost with rude imperativeness forbade any "stranger's meddling" in the matter.

It was the use of this word that induced Mr. Pendragon to reply very warmly that he conceived himself to have something more than a "stranger's" right to assist in the protection of Miss Rosanna Clanbrassey! And then Madame de la Mazurka, unable to restrain her nature, immediately broke out with—"Oh, yes, dear uncle! Oh, yes, dear Mr. Pendragon! Rosanna has told me all; and how flattered she is, and how flattered we all ought to be, with Mr. Pendragon's prompt—exceedingly prompt!—overtures for a matrimonial arrangement be-

tween our families; which, I am sure, my dear uncle—"

But there Mr. Pendragon conceived it due to himself to take up the "wondrous tale," and in a few grave, gentlemanly words, he let his fellow-gentleman understand that he had conceived so much respect and attachment for his niece, Miss Rosanna Clanbrassey—conceived she was so well calculated in every way to secure the happiness of the remainder of his life—that he had asked permission to dedicate it to her, and had received her consent, provided her beloved uncle, to whom she owed so great a debt of gratitude, gave his.

Important as this communication was, Mr. Featherstone's comment was apparently most strangely frivolous, and away from the point.

"I really did not expect, Mr. Pendragon—it is an honour certainly which—what a terrible want of neatness on Rosanna's part—to tear a paper to pieces all about the floor!" and Mr. Featherstone began to pick up the scattered shreds of the bailiff's communication to his niece; repulsing, almost with fierceness, the Countess's proffered aid—"It is just possible

that as the man is half a madman in himself, and besots himself with opiates at times, he might say or do something calling for my interference! Please allow me to devote my exclusive attention—so far as listening goes —to Dobson at this moment!" he continued, busying himself thus.

The haughty Welsh gentleman had good reason to be surprised, and offended even, at so extraordinary a postponement of his claims on notice to the doings of an insolent underling, and at Mr. Featherstone's careful housemaid-like proceedings at the moment. He rose indignantly, and walked with evident disgust to the window, where Madame de la Mazurka immediately joined him, to offer some still stranger, undertoned apologies for her uncle's curious behaviour. "He is a man of one idea at all times, as I told you, Mr. Pendragon!—very penurious —and this affair is one of pounds, shillings, and pence!" she remarked. "And, besides, my uncle is justly exasperated at my sister's folly in allowing him to sign all sorts of unconsidered papers that, I believe, place his estate in a sort of way at the man's mercy, unless some legal

remedy can be found. Perhaps, Mr. Pendragon, you had better, after all, return with me to-night to Liverpool until this unpleasant, crazy sort of business can be got satisfactorily over!"

"I shall take my dismissal, madam, from no one but Miss Clanbrassey herself. Not even her uncle! But I must say this whole affair of allowing a servant's intrusion into an assemblage of his friends, surprises me in Mr. Featherstone! I would have had the fellow drawn through a horse-pond for such impertinence!"

This peevish episode, however, served to pass the time in the Cedar-Parlour; and meanwhile Rosanna Clanbrassey mounted the flight of principal stairs to her own bedchamber, as if on the precautions against espionage she had announced to her persecutor.

She entered the chamber, however, also: locked the door, and, crossing it swiftly, without suffering a footfall to be heard, to a toilette-table, drew out a ring of small keys, and unlocked a casket that stood upon it. There were some valuable jewels within, the gifts of her uncle; but Miss Clanbrassey's business was not with

them. Her business was with a small phial couched under some of the white cotton bedding of the valuables, labelled distinctly: "Prussic Acid. Deadly Poison. Dose: Two Drops in a Wineglassful of Water! Hellebore & Sage. Birmingham."

"I meant it for myself in case of the worst; but I'll not grudge it to him! He is my only real Heart Disease, for whose severest spasms this drug of mine is so efficacious! If Two Drops are sanative, Fifty will surely be a perfect cure, Master Bailiff Blackmore! But I must not be too liberal, or the almond smell——No; this dark vapour of the laudanum overpowers every other!—So!—I must give him no time for suspicion!"

And as hurriedly replacing her own phial, after transferring a considerable portion of its contents, in undiluted strength, to the bailiff's sedative, Rosanna relocked her casket, as she thought, and walked downstairs again at a more deliberate pace than she had ascended. Purposely so, that she might betray no signs of hurry or agitation.

And it was well she observed the precaution.

Blackmore stood with the study-door in hand, anxiously awaiting her return, and watching for it—full of suspicion, though not daring to look out.

Yet not on such rational scores of suspicion as he might well have had! "I thought you were only palavering me over, and might perhaps be fool enough to do yourself a mischief, rather than not cheat me in the end!" he muttered, as he thought, playfully.

With what indescribable hatred the heart of Rosanna Clanbrassey flamed up on finding that the man so thoroughly comprehended how she abhorred him, and yet was determined to compel her into so hateful an union!

"All is well; nobody listening. Can you not trust in my word without the written promise?" she exclaimed. "I am assuredly of age; no other consent is needed!"

"It may, perhaps, be necessary if I went to London for a licence; it will be my only security you will not again break your word!" was the inexorable reply; and, however unwillingly, Rosanna felt compelled to satisfy the bailiff in this particular. She seated herself, therefore, at her

uncle's desk, and hastily penned the shortest form she could contrive to meet the exigency. "Featherstone Hall, Lancashire, August 7th, 18—: I am thirty-five years of age, entirely at my own disposal, and I authorize Mr. Abednego Blackmore to procure a licence for his marriage with me. Rosanna Clanbrassey."

At Mr. Blackmore's request she even added the date and the locality of the writing, thus. These were minor matters, on which she did not think proper to hesitate. She took the ink off with some blotting-paper, and deliberately handing it to him, inquired "When do you set off for London?"

"To-morrow," he replied, turning deadly pale at his own triumph—well he might! "But it quite makes me ill! Do you want all the Black Wine, Miss Featherstone? If not——"

"No: I meant to return it to you. I remember the pledge I have made to myself. But you must promise me also to yield less to this pernicious habit, Blackmore, when these anxieties of yours are put to rest for ever. Do you return to the Hut to-night?" Miss Clanbrassey replied, almost in tones of tenderness, and draw-

ing the light green flask from her pocket, as if for the first time recollecting it.

"I have no other covering for my head; that is one of the things which have made me so determined as I am to carry out this business!" he replied.

"Promise me, then, that you will not touch another drop of this pernicious liquid until you reach your shelter, and that you will not touch a single drop of it to-morrow!"

"I will promise it all, Miss Featherstone There is nothing I will not do to prove what a true and humble servant and lover I am, and always will be, when——"

"Keep your distance now, then, if you would not provoke me beyond endurance," said Rosanna, repulsing a movement of the bailiff with inexpressible loathing. "Who can tell who is observing us?" she continued, feeling the necessity of prolonged dissimulation. "Let us even blind suspicion by appearing to part on angry terms. But if you are in reality so truly anxious to win my good opinion, observe the two promises you have made me to the very letter, however insignificant they may appear to

you. And assuredly, in return, I will fulfil mine when you arrive with the licence in your hand to demand your wife. I yield to fate."

"Fate has done it all, dear miss. When I was a babe in arms an old spae-wife predicted that I should live to be a rich man, and should marry a woman that was a lady by birth," said Blackmore, retreating from the imperious gesture that warned him back. "My time will come!" he muttered to himself.

"Now go!" said Rosanna, rising hurriedly. "We have been too long together as it is! Leave me as if in much anger and discontent over the agreement. Mr. Dobson, show Mr. Blackmore out! Nothing remains, then, my good man," she said in a loud and angry tone, as she opened the door, "but for my uncle to appeal to the law; and it will soon be seen, I imagine, that you have taken an unfair advantage of my ignorance of the value of the property, and influence with my uncle, to get you that absurd grant. The Court of Chancery will assuredly overrule the agreement!"

Mr. Blackmore was not very skilful at taking an acting cue, but he managed pretty well in

his reply. "I am going to London to-morrow, madam, and I intend to get some good advice on the subject. I want nothing but what is fair. You were always a good mistress, and the squire a good master, and why should you both turn against me so suddenly——"

He said no more, but turned with his hat at a flourish to make a parting bow, and gave a grin of intelligence which greatly annoyed old Dobson himself, but was destined to remain an ineffaceable photograph on Rosanna's mind, as they say the eyes of a murdered man retain the image of his murderer. She sickened all over as she saw it, and had scarcely strength to stagger back and close the study door with the affectation of a disdainful slam, muttering to herself the words—"He always takes his draught before going to bed. I have but to be at the solitary Hut, and to redeem the paper before his doom is discovered, and all will be well—all for ever well!"

CHAPTER IX.

EXPLANATIONS THAT DON'T EXPLAIN.

In a very short interval after her scene with the doomed bailiff, Miss Clanbrassey rallied sufficiently to resolve upon returning to the company in the Cedar Parlour. And, considering the violence of the emotions she had undergone, she succeeded in doing so with a wonderful external appearance of calm and composure.

Whether this was effected by the support of the horrible hope she had reason to cherish, or whether it was simply the sublimed tranquillity of despair, it would be hard to say. The results were, however, the same. Lady Macbeth herself, politely dismissing the terrified coronation guests, could hardly have gone through her ceremonials with a better appearance of not

knowing why she should not, than Miss Clanbrassey displayed on the occasion.

But, in truth, she felt that the die was irrevocably cast, and that her only business was now with consequences. Could she retrieve the damning paper she had been obliged to sign, and deliver into the possession of her victimising victim, all the rest could easily be explained and accounted for.

What more likely, indeed, than that a desperate man should commit suicide? And Miss Clanbrassey determined to represent her late insolent challenger as rendered so in the interview just concluded between them. Desperate in every sense! Then, if she could only secure a short interval for unobserved action, when the catastrophe had occurred, the paper she had signed—the written Promise of Marriage—might be easily withdrawn from a dead man's palsied hold!

With this view it would certainly be very advisable—almost necessary—to procure Mr. Pendragon's absence for a short period, while the dark tragedy at hand emerged like a sweep from behind its muffling pall of mystery, and

the flying soots of the movement could be gathered together, and sacked for ever away from men's sight!

Might it not be very possible still, and without offence, to obtain his departure with the Countess?

It was so essential a point, that Miss Clanbrassey determined to hazard something even in the way of offence to effect it. She had the idea in her head when she re-entered the Cedar Parlour.

Circumstances, here, however, wore no very favourable aspect.

She found that Madame de la Mazurka, wearied of her protracted absence, had declared she could wait no longer for tea, or anything, and had gone up-stairs to put on her bonnet and shawl while the carriage was getting ready. The two gentlemen were sitting opposite each other, quite silent, with each an untasted glass of claret before him, and looking with moody anxiety towards the door, expecting her return. Mr. Pendragon wondering at everything, and not the least at the almost idiotic care and patience with which his entertainer had picked

up, to the smallest shred, his niece's torn letter from the bailiff, and had besides transferred the débris to a pocket-book, which he then replaced in his breast-coat.

The expectant parties certainly revived a little at Miss Clanbrassey's cheerful tone on her return.

"I have to beg a thousand pardons, Mr. Pendragon," she said, "for my long absence. But no one but myself understands the affair completely between my uncle and this man; and as I was the chief means of bringing about the complication, through my ignorance of business matters, I had the most reason to strive to unravel it. My uncle has, besides, no patience with persons in the lower ranks presuming to dictate to him, and, as our bailiff's insolence had reached so strange a pass, I thought it best to show him how far he had gone beyond his depth. I believe I have succeeded in this, brutishly ignorant and set on his own interests as the fellow is. But, besides, I had discovered defalcations and discrepancies in Mr. Blackmore's accounts, which I am ashamed to confess I had previously allowed to pass muster,

through excess of confidence in the honesty of a man who came to us so recommended as Mr. Blackmore did for that quality, and who was, moreover, always boasting of his boundless share in it. What I have shown and stated to him have, I believe, produced a decisive effect. I never saw any creature go away so crestfallen and downhearted as this fellow, from a discussion he entered upon so insolently and triumphantly. Especially about that cow, uncle, poor Mopsy, which he pretended he had sold for next to nothing. I am credibly informed he got five-and-twenty pounds for her. She is of a celebrated Lancashire race, Mr. Pendragon! But where's my sister?"

"But why did you not mention this discovery before, Rosanna? I would have had him up before my neighbour Brocklebank for embezzlement this very afternoon, and in Lancashire Castle, I trust, before night," said Mr. Featherstone, in a dissatisfied tone, as if scarcely able to credit news so good.

"For that very reason, my dear uncle! I dreaded your impetuosity. Nor had I any distinct proofs at hand quite yet, and I desired

to use the influence of the threats and promises I could hold out to induce Blackmore to surrender without further difficulty his part-hold on some of your property, which, however clever an agriculturist he may be—and I daresay he would pay the rent punctually enough, too—it would be unpleasant to allow him henceforth to retain."

"And does he consent to go?" said Mr. Featherstone.

"Why, no! He has not yielded so full an acknowledgment of his cheatery, and extremely bad behaviour in other respects, so completely as that!" replied Rosanna, with hesitation, afraid she was making too extensive promises, in case any accident should prevent the completion of the catastrophe she speculated so boldly already upon.

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do!" exclaimed Mr. Featherstone in one of his passions, "I will eject him by main force—with the help of my tenants and servants—from his hovel; and lay it level with the Moss, to prevent any chance of his return, before I am an hour older."

"I shall be happy to make one in so very

proper and justifiable a proceeding, Mr. Featherstone, as well as to bear witness to the extremity of insolence and audacity that provoked it," said the Welsh gentleman, with Welsh impetuosity.

"Pray, Mr. Pendragon, do not add fuel to my uncle's natural irritation and rashness," interrupted Rosanna, whom measures so precipitate would not suit at all. "I shall accomplish everything that can be wished, in a quiet and equitable manner, if I am allowed. I have told you how utterly dejected and inclined to submission the poor wretch is gone away, and how much better it will be to secure a quiet surrender of his stupid grants. He can be of endless nuisance and trouble to us otherwise, turn him out however much you might. And what would people think, sir, if you were to cast out the man, in the deplorable state of health in which your ex-bailiff is, with a disorder in the lungs, to perish in the night air on a desolate marsh?"

"It is a fine warm night, with a splendid harvest moon rising; can't the fellow trudge it to some fitter shelter, Miss Clanbrassey, than a habitation he occupies against the will of its

owner?" queried the chieftain of Pendragon Mohr.

"No, sir," replied Rosanna, after a slight hesitation, "I happen to be aware—rather too well aware—that the bailiff is at this moment labouring under the effects of a terribly extra dose of his favourite remedy—opium!"

"Does your bailiff make you the confidant of his medical condition, Miss Clanbrassey?" said the haughty gentleman, with a glance of amazement mingled with suspicion.

"There are some physical conditions which cannot be concealed perhaps, Mr. Pendragon. Intoxication is one of them!" retorted Rosanna, and in a tone of retort, too, for she was chafing with the inward agony of her feelings, thus stretched upon the rack.

"I should have thought the man, then, in a very unfit state for conference with a lady," was the sharp reply.

"I—I did not notice the circumstance until I had committed myself to the interview: above all things, then, I dreaded any irritating interference," Miss Clanbrassey answered, in a meeker and more appealing tone to her newly plighted

lover; "and can you not imagine, Mr. Pendragon," she continued, still more soothingly, "that aware of the too high and generous opinion you have formed of my abilities, I should desire to veil from you the deplorable oversights I have committed in this transaction?"

Mr. Pendragon bowed, and looked and felt both soothed and gratified. Mr. Featherstone himself seemed to consider there was some cogency in the argument addressed to himself.

"The rascal shall have till daybreak with his wheezy lungs, then," he said. "Not an hour longer! Ullathorn shall collect me a party of my tenants with his own keepers for the enterprise, at the very peep of day. They all hate him, and will be happy to give him turn-about of a rare game of evictions he has been playing already himself on my estate. My very rookery was assailed, Mr. Pendragon. Ullathorn tells me he had decreed all the nests should be beaten down next spring, to dispossess a colony that has flourished in my woods for centuries! To-morrow, at daybreak! I'll lead the expedition myself, and take upon myself in that way clearly

all the consequences, if I remain a living man till then."

This was a dreadful intimation to Rosanna, who knew that her uncle's tones in the utterance forbade all hope that he could be moved by argument or entreaty from it. And daybreak came very early in August.

But worse than that. Mr. Pendragon, with his national irascibility and relish for a fray, declared that in that case he should make it a point to attend Mr. Featherstone, as his aide-de-camp, in the clearance. "I consider myself insulted also by the fellow!" he said. "When I had scarcely made my appearance on his land —if it is his land—to serve me with notice against trespass, and in forms so insolent!"

"I trust not—I hope you will not think of such a thing, Mr. Pendragon," said Rosanna, quite desperate at this addition to her fears and calamities. "On the contrary, I wish you most earnestly to return at once to Liverpool, and remain there until this whole unhappy affair is settled. I do indeed! The 12th of August will be soon enough for your return, when our flocks of grouse will be in readiness for your

gun. For, in the first place, Madame de la Mazurka is highly offended at being deserted by a protection on which she had relied for her return by night to Liverpool. And in the next —in the next—it is strange, it is unaccountable—but, in short, Mr. Pendragon, I have explained to you that Bailiff Blackmore is a madman as well as a person who places himself under the action of intoxicating drugs. And he has taken an antipathy against you which really threatens your life with danger. Any one—the bravest of mankind—may dread the irrational fury of a madman. And that this man is one there needs surely no other proof than that he has had the audacity—in our recent interview—to declare to me that *he* loves *me* to distraction, and perceiving that I—that I—love you—that we have plighted one another our troths—is determined to have your life-blood—or mine—or both—rather than allow us to conclude our arrangement in peace. That, sir, was one of my special reasons—knowing the man always goes about armed with loaded pistols and a knife—to face him alone, and allow his frenzy no play to your harm!"

"Good God, Rosanna! You declare this!" exclaimed Mr. Featherstone. "Then, as I said before, I will not lose a moment to come to conclusions with a fellow of such insolence, madman or not!"

"In truth—if this be the amazing state of the case—I conceive myself entitled to a share in revenging so unutterable an insult offered to a lady who—a lady who—Mr. Featherstone, consider me wholly at your disposal in this matter," said the fiery Pendragon, confused and most painfully struck, nevertheless, by the revelation.

"No, sir—no, uncle! I will not allow you for one moment to put your own lives, or that of this unhappy lunatic, in jeopardy. The only chance will be to take him at unawares—to-morrow, as my uncle proposes, when he is plunged in one of those deep sleeps he probably owes to his drug; for I have heard Mrs. Ullathorn say, she often could not wake him of a morning, do what she could to rouse him for his meals. As you are the object of his most insane fury, Mr. Pendragon, you, above all, should be farthest from the scene; and I again

implore you to assure your safety—and mine—and all our chances of quietly securing the lunatic—an asylum will be his fittest prison-house! —by returning with my sister to Liverpool."

"You are very anxious to have me out of the way—of danger, Miss Clanbrassey," said Mr. Pendragon, with evident suspicion in his manner. "But I was never afraid of any man or woman born, sane or insane—and I am not going to begin with a lunatic ploughman."

"It will be best, however, as my niece wishes it, Mr. Pendragon. I certainly shall not think of your sharing in the steps that may be necessary to remove this intolerable nuisance from the countryside! I must request you to return at present to Liverpool; and in a few days—by the 12th—I—we shall be most happy to see you again. And I can then give you an intelgible reply to your flattering proposals to Miss Clanbrassey, which——"

"I cannot take upon me to remain, indeed, with whatever good intentions, at a house against the declared wishes of both master and mistress," said Mr. Pendragon, coldly, and no doubt greatly surprised and offended at the ob-

stinate declining of his services; "I will therefore return, as requested, to Liverpool, with Madame de la Mazurka, and when your moors are more at your own disposal, Mr. Featherstone, I shall be glad to witness your exploits upon them. But I must say, the fancies of this inexplicable madman are strangely consulted in what is done. At all events, I should say, that application for a proper police force had better be made on this projected service, since you apprehend a violent resistance on the part of the bailiff to his removal."

"No, Mr. Pendragon; no police! What my uncle does in this case must be done illegally, and he will take the consequences in the way of damages. No jury will assign heavy ones, after the man's behaviour, I should say. But leave us to work out the problem in our own manner. All will be satisfactorily arranged before you return on the 12th. And my uncle, it appears, is aware that he will then have to receive a relation, as well as a most dear friend and honoured guest."

Mr. Featherstone murmured some words of acquiescence, and Mr. Pendragon, bowing again

very stiffly and formally, requested to know whether Madame the Countess was in readiness for his attendance, or whether he had better send up a message to know when she desired to start.

Miss Clanbrassey felt all that was implied by this frosted manner, but at the same time that the one great and paramount object of the moment was to get rid of that fixed and perilous observation. She hastily desired Dobson to bring in coffee, and stating that she would go and look after the Countess herself, made her exit apparently with this view, and went upstairs to her bedchamber, where she expected to find her.

And there she was in reality. But how engaged? In inspecting the contents of Miss Clanbrassey's jewel-box, which she imagined she had fastened, after returning the bottle of prussic acid; but in her hurry and confusion had locked without closing.

At the very moment Rosanna entered, Madame the Countess was busied examining the bottle of the deadly fluid, holding it at arm's length, as if she feared its influence even then.

"Oh, good gracious, Rosanna, I was just admiring your collection of valuables, and have lighted on this horrible thing! A deadly poison! Whatever can you have this for?" she exclaimed, seeing her sister.

"It is good for spasms, to which I have of late been very subject," replied Rosanna; but a sudden thought occurred to her that if any discovery should be made of the real cause of the bailiff's death, it would not do for her to be found with a corresponding poisonous distillation in her possession. At the same time she dared still less attempt to conceal it, or make away with it. The strong scent could not be suppressed, whatever she did with it in the way of crushing and destruction to the containing vessel.

After a moment's consideration she therefore added: "At least, it has been prescribed for me, but I have not as yet ventured to take any. I should like to know whether there is any danger in doing so. Would you mind taking this bottle away with you to Liverpool, and asking my sister's doctor—Dr. Primmer—whether it

is of a proper preparation, or if he can recommend me any milder one?"

"Well, I really think I better had," remarked the Countess, in her pleasing way. "If anything queer should fall out to prevent your arrangement with the Welshman, you seem to have taken such a singular fancy to him, my dear, that I do not think you ought to have the power of doing yourself a mischief left in your hands. But what have you done with that horrid bailiff, too, who seems to have such a power and privilege to torment you?"

"I don't think he will torment any one very long. He left me muttering that he was weary of his life, and anxious to be at an end with things, after I had pointed out to him the numerous fraudulent mistakes he has made in his accounts. I had an accountant at them while I was in Liverpool; that was the letter I called for at the post office, Philippina — who has pointed out many designed errors, since they are all in Blackmore's favour. But don't make him of more consequence than he deserves. Don't talk much about him on your way back, for I have induced Mr. Pendragon to see the

impropriety of his abandoning your escort on the return, and he has promised to go with you."

"Have you, indeed, Miss Clanbrassey? I am sure I am incredibly obliged to you," replied the Countess, with a deep, mocking, disdainful curtsy, and clearly much annoyed at the superior influence of the plighted lady. "Well, I shall not abuse my privileges. I shall scarcely speak to him going back. You have enough to contend against in the sweet exhalations from the grave of your predecessor. I hope in return you will leave my uncle in the mind to remember me in the small manner he seems to hint he shall in his will, and not to leave me an absolute beggar. And as a parting piece of good advice let me recommend you, as soon as possible, to get rid of that beautiful young creature at the gate; for there is no more common end of one of these old woman-hating bachelors, than to resign all their facts and theories in favour of some untutored piece of outside loveliness like that."

Rosanna made no reply to this excellent advice, attached no importance—most likely hardly

any meaning, to it at the time. She only hurried on Madame's preparations; and earnestly requesting her to be careful of her formidable medicine, placed it at her desire in her patent leather travelling bag.

They descended then to the Cedar Parlour, where they found Mr. Pendragon impatiently pacing up and down the chamber, and not disguising his hurry to be gone; while Mr. Featherstone, contrary to the laws of civility and his customary habits, sat lost in gloomy silence, anxiously expecting the relief of the departure also.

And now I am very far from alleging, or insinuating, that Madame de la Mazurka had any malicious design in what she did, or purposed any species of exposé of her sister's ailments and violent remedies either to her uncle or Mr. Pendragon. But it is the case, that as soon as she reached the hearth, and was preparing to take a fond farewell of her uncle, she held her bag so that the prussic acid bottle dropped out, and fell with a clash to the marble, and shivered of course to pieces on it.

"Bless me! what is that? What a strong

smell of almonds!" exclaimed Mr. Featherstone. "Is it some invaluable cosmetic, Flippy?"

This word greatly irritated the Countess, who expected that her roseate complexion was to pass muster as natural beauty. She therefore replied with warmth, not considering what harm she might do in other quarters: "No, uncle! it is Rosanna's medicine for her spasms of the chest, which she is afraid is too strong—reasonably enough, being a deadly poison, and I am to have it seen to in Liverpool!"

"Prussic acid!" said Mr. Pendragon, raising the larger portion of the bottle which remained unbroken. "Hellebore and Sage, Birmingham. Humph!"

"Put it in the fire; my niece must be mad to let these people persuade her into taking such horrid compounds for a common indigestion!" said Mr. Featherstone, snatching away the portion held by Mr. Pendragon, really quite violently, and throwing it into the grate. And he then commenced, as strangely as he had gathered the fragments of the note, to sweep up the broken phial, and throw them into the same receptacle.

"Are you ready, madam? When you are under my care, Miss Clanbrassey, you will not meddle with these heroic remedies!" said Mr. Pendragon, using a quaint old medicinal term, and offering his arm to the Countess, seemingly without any intention of taking any further farewell of his bride elect.

But he could not withstand the bursting expression in those unhappy eyes when raising them and her hands together, Rosanna exclaimed, in really heart-rending accents—"Do not be angry with me, Mr. Pendragon. All I do is for the best. I know not what else to do than what I do, God help me!"

"So I believe—so I believe, my poor dear lady! But what is it you do?" were Mr. Pendragon's last words as, wringing Rosanna's hand with an expression of anguish, and raising it deliberately to his lips, he walked out of the chamber to conceal his emotion.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the leave-taking of the Countess from her honoured uncle. It was a second edition of the morning's display, with an additional forcing power laid on the waterworks. But Mr. Featherstone so clearly

took no notice of the affecting part of the exhibition—so clearly wished it over—that the Countess, in high dudgeon, took her departure; and, scarcely touching the tips of her sister's fingers as she retired, exclaimed, "I am sorry about the medicine; but why both you and uncle should owe me a spite for so mere an accident, I cannot dream!"

The moment the visitors were gone, accompanied with very slack ceremonial to their carriage, Mr. Featherstone desired Dobson to tell Ullathorn to attend him immediately on a business of importance.

Rosanna, discerning but too clearly what this meant, made another attempt to dissuade her uncle from so immediate violent measures. But he silenced her at once. "If you ever speak a word again in this vile scamp's favour, I shall believe you are on his side of the question! To-morrow, at daybreak, I will pounce upon him, and, if provocation can extort it, will learn from him the worst he can have to say against me or mine!"

"You run great risks from a madman; otherwise I am indifferent on my own part!" replied

Rosanna, almost in a tone of careless defiance, so exhausted was she with her long struggle against events and appearances.

"None from his weapons, however!" returned her uncle, with a wild sneer. "Ullathorn told me he tried to shoot at my crows, and hardly knew the butt from the muzzle of a gun!"

Miss Clanbrassey made no reply, but apparently waited calmly enough until the under-bailiff arrived, and received his master's instructions to assemble some dozen of the young men about the farm and gamekeepers' lodges, to proceed on a summary and literal action of ejectment against his late superior, at Hang-Dog Hut, by break of day. Mr. Featherstone announced his intention of clearing the property of him and his without farther delay; and declaring that he took upon himself the whole responsibility of the proceeding, received from Ullathorn a very hearty assurance that his Honour might depend on the young men doing whatever he might require in the case, with perfect indifference to whosoever else it might please or displease beside.

Rosanna carefully listened to ascertain whence

these forces were to be levied, and at what hour they were to assemble. But she seemed to shun all further controversy with her uncle on the point; for when the under-bailiff withdrew, she almost immediately arose, and, observing that she was utterly exhausted by the fatigues of the day, asked her uncle's leave to retire.

He gave it to her hastily; adding, with a degree of bitterness and sarcastic innuendo she had scarcely ever before noticed in him, "And joyful dreams over this happy event in our annals of a proposal actually offered for sanction to the head of the family! My system and schooling produce most excellent fruit. Good-night, Miss Clanbrassey! Sleep on roses as an affianced bride should. To-morrow I will rid you of one fear or the other—uncle or bailiff! I shall not go unarmed to the meeting. My rusty fowling-piece will have a formidable effect on so cockney a sportsman as your Scot; and I shall carry it over my shoulder, with the butt-end presented for firing!"

The unhappy lady affected to take no notice of the sharp meaning contained in these observations, beside their external sound. But

also—for the first time for so many years that she had shared her uncle's household kindness, and love—he let her go that night without bestowing upon her his usual paternal kiss and affectionate blessing for the night. And, stranger yet, she never noticed the omission!

CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT OF TERRORS.

It was ten o'clock—no more—the great hall clock was striking the hour, when Miss Clanbrassey left her uncle in the Cedar Parlour, ostensibly to take the repose she certainly most excessively needed—in reality to prepare and brace herself up for a fatiguing and perilous excursion—for a task replete with almost every form of terror and menace humanity could scarcely be supposed to face, without passing at once into the wildness of insanity and despair.

She had to quit that old roomy country house, where every sound echoed to the remotest quarters, unheard and unobserved by its inhabitants. She had to cross an extensive

tract of park-land, sinking often into deep hollows and overshadowed by woods; to cross (it was the nearest way), by stepping-stones, a wide-spreading, dark-watered, noisy stream; then to traverse the windings of a black-sea waste or moss, or whatever it might be called, until she reached an ill-omened solitary hovel, on a jut of rocks, where she expected to find—WHAT?

Ah! what? The best hope—the almost certain expectation—of this terrible, this unfortunate woman, was to find there the corpse of a man murdered by her agency! of a man whom she had at all events, under whatever delirium, once permitted to believe she loved him. Cut off by assassination in the very moment when he imagined himself at the triumph and culmination of his evil earthly hopes and ambition, by the hand of her who had treacherously encouraged him to entertain them up to the instant of casting him off into the abyss! A man that, base and designing as he might be in himself, had an aged mother who cherished him continually in her hopes and prayers, and who, perhaps, had no other joy or comfort, or support in the world!

Singularly enough—influenced it may be by a painful though vague sense of contrast in her remembrance of the coldness of her late parting with her uncle—this latter idea dwelt with the utmost pertinacity for a time in Rosanna's mind. An anguish of pity suddenly fell upon her towards that unknown and far distant mother, who had either already lost—or in a few moments would lose—the object of her aged affections and regrets.

All the pressing, the overwhelming motives which had driven her upon that direful means of relief; her passionate preference for Mr. Pendragon; her devoted love and gratitude to her uncle, that had made every sacrifice seem to her little, rather than expose him to anguish and degradation so utter as she knew he would conceive he had fallen into, should her own be discovered; her hatred and contempt for the odious and rapacious villain who had worked out her misery by such foul artifices and treason; all these immense motives, which at the time appeared so irresistible, suddenly faded away around her, and seemed to leave her a solitary and causeless monster of cruelty

and treachery in the face of her hideous deed.

For what was this Mr. Pendragon, for whose sake she had slaughtered even that mean and despicable man? A man whom she had known as it were but for a few hours; whose prime of existence was over—whose hair was grizzled—whose heart was in reality still devoted in allegiance to another, dead and gone. What was he, to commit such a crime to secure as a husband? What were even her uncle's heart-break and indignation in the failure of his favourite hopes and purposes, compared with the worth of her immortal soul? Oh! even the unspeakable hatred and loathing which the very name of her trepanner rather than seducer had long kindled in Miss Clanbrassey's heart, yielded to sentiments of as unspeakable horror and pity at the fearful doom which would consign him in a moment, with all his unrepented offences on his head—at a moment when he fancied himself on the verge of a crowning success, the reward of his wickedness—to an eternal judgment!

When this array of dismal reflections and convictions had grouped themselves once in all

their darkness in Rosanna's mind, during her first brief interval of rest from the distracting pressure of her situation, she was seized with a species of mad incredulity, and could not believe in what she yet knew was happening, and would happen on. What! she!—Miss Clanbrassey, of the Haugh—a lady of family and position, the beloved and fondly cherished niece of one of the first gentlemen of her native county! she, a murderess!—the murderess of a wretched caitiff hireling, hardly worth the expense of the drug that would do the work of her great loathing and scorn upon him!

It is true there was no melting of tenderer sentiments—no reminiscences of any real past affection—to plead in Rosanna Clanbrassey's heart on behalf of her detested betrayer. Not lover! He had never been her lover in any genuine sense of the word. I think she had always had a deep contempt, ripening into abhorrency, for his mean and cringing and cruel nature, as he gradually unfolded his characteristics, and showed how detestably they combined the crawl of the serpent with the tiger's spring.

And yet, there was no species of what may be called failure of physical courage in Rosanna Clanbrassey's sudden dread and horror at the idea that she had exposed herself to die the most shameful of felon deaths. She remained a woman of undaunted and unquailing mettle in all that regarded the mere suffering or terror of such a doom. But the associated notion of the ignominy, the eternal disgrace that must attach to her as long as her name was remembered upon the earth—her uncle's share in the fearful burden of her shame, if a discovery were made—these reflections seemed to deprive her of all her supernatural vitality of revenge and resolve.

More than once, as ideas of this kind chased one another through her mind, Miss Clanbrassey made a move towards the bell, with a wild determination to summon assistance—to reveal all—to send swift messengers on flying steeds to avert the catastrophe—to warn the bailiff of his danger! Could she but bring herself to reveal the secret of their mutual interest in each other, she distractedly thought, she could pretend to these messengers she had

made a mistake in a medicine she had given Mr. Blackmore for his asthma, and save him without scandal and declaration of the full hateful truth of the projected assassination.

But if he lived, he would know very well there could be no accident—that his destruction was intended and forecast: that he was only saved by a cowardly impulse or dread! He would proclaim all! She would become the outcast, the wondering abhorrence—the laughter also of mankind! To have dared so much, and make so impotent a conclusion and foil to her own deed!

Thrice did these reflections paralyse Rosanna Clanbrassey's hand upon the bell-rope, which might have spoken redemption to the now distant doomed! The lessons of her uncle had indeed sunk deep into her mind—the delusions that place the opinion of mankind above all the true instincts of the human heart and of Christian morality! The Celtic blood of Rosanna Clanbrassey, mingled with the calmer-surfaced but more implacable and eating fire of the red Saxon fluid in her veins, returned from

that cold ebb with a fiercer and more sulphureous glow.

But, in fact, as she cast her eye upon the hands of her watch, during this long silent combat of ideas, she started—as it were, awoke—to perceive that the time for interposition had passed!

Either Bailiff Blackmore had swallowed his usual quantity of laudanum, before retiring to rest for his early journey for his wedding licence on the following day—and was a stiff and stark corpse in whatever place and attitude he had applied his lips to his phial—or he had exercised some most unusual piece of self-denial, and, in reserve for the event of the morrow, had determined to endure the pains of his malady, rather than run the risk of oversleeping himself for his great business on the following day.

There was this hope!

Hope! was it a hope? No, most certainly, no! The instant Miss Clanbrassey realized to herself her persecutor living, well at his ease, snoring with his bald head in a well-worn night-cap, in preparation for his next day's task—all her dislike, all her detestation of him returned.

Let him die, whatever were the consequence to herself!—to her uncle!—to Mr. Pendragon! to all the world! Let the hated, imperious, masterful, unjust villain die!

Die! but with that paper in his possession? It would only be an additional certainty of exposure and disgrace!

No! that paper must be redeemed from that possession at every hazard—cost what it would! Else would he have died in vain—else would she live to suffer all the penalties she had committed that great crime—incurred that enormous hazard—to avoid!

If he were dead, what mattered it? Could he look more detestable—more malignant—more cowardly—more every way worthy of vengeance and hate than he had looked alive?

For she calculated, one might say to a nicety—the probable instant of the catastrophe; allowanced out the bailiff's movements to his doom, and the act of it, with a fearful precision, staring at her watch in her open hand, seated in her toilette chair, and making the horrible reckoning tick, by tick as it were!

Blackmore had been gone to his destruction

now nearly an hour and a half. Miss Clanbrassey knew the distance he had to traverse, and his rate of movement, almost as exactly as if she were accompanying him, step by step, upon it. He would proceed with unusual alertness, however, she calculated, on this occasion. He would advance lightly on his bubbles of triumph and success. The quantity of the dark restorative he loved and had taken would sustain his cheer and alacrity of spirit. It would combine with the promise he had made to her, to guarantee that he would not touch the fatal phial again until he entered his outlandish domicile.

All this would consume an hour, or a little more. Then, after some few preliminaries, ighting a fire perhaps against the damp, partaking of some frugal refreshment, he would revert to his usual means of ensuring sleep. And then!——

"And then!" Rosanna exclaimed to herself —almost she shrieked it aloud—she was a murderess! She—Miss Clanbrassey, of Featherstone Hall—was a murderess!

A murderess!—and as such liable to the

doom of the meanest felon!—the most degrading of all deaths, swung between the earth and sky, as if rejected, spurned alike by both, and thrown to the wind, out of the fellowship of all humanity.

As Rosanna Clanbrassey realized this awful certainty, and the position into which it would reduce her, a terror like that of the immediate presence of death in her own person came over her, and she would have given the whole world for power to stretch forth her hand, and save the wretch she had doomed. Even her own life, she thought, she would most joyfully and unhesitatingly have laid down to withdraw her victim from his else inevitable fate.

If, even, he continued alive, might not that paper be redeemed from his grasp?

Rosanna knew the secret to open the door of "Hang-Dog Hut," without disturbance to an inmate, who would confide in the belief that only persons authorized to enter were aware of the peculiar trick that supplied the place of strong bolts and bars with it. Might she not steal her way in, and remove the paper secretly, while he slept?

It was worth trying, at all events; and to believe that he might still be alive, took away much of the horror of the adventure. And now, when that other whirl of thoughts was thus dismissed, came this one. How was the journey to Featherstone Moss to be accomplished, without exciting an observation which would prove the destruction of her objects?

To leave the house unobserved it would be necessary to wait until its inmates were fast asleep. A likely speedy result for all not so tossed in mind as the unhappy calculator, after that day of domestic fatigue and effort. In truth, the servants' apartments were sufficiently remote to warrant the belief that once retired, they would hear nothing of what might happen in the part of the house where Miss Clanbrassey lay.

Her uncle's apartment, certainly, was only separated by a short passage and a massive door, usually left open from the landing-place into which her own communicated. But when he was secluded for the night, and an interval afforded him to fall asleep,—or even if only a soundless progress was made—there would be

no difficulty in descending to the ground-floor of the mansion. The Cedar Parlour windows were only about a couple of feet above the level of the courtyard, walled in, and with a yew tree in the midst, which cast its broad shadow almost to a gateway, carelessly secured, as a general fact, by a single bolt. That led into the road across the park—which ended in a shallow, wide-spread stream—which being crossed, the Moss only had to be traversed to reach Hang-Dog Hut.

To be sure there was a dog of the largest and most ferocious mastiff kind, always loose at night in the courtyard; and Rosanna Clanbrassey had never cultivated very amicable relations with her uncle's canine favourites. Still this dog would know her, and offer no obstruction to her progress.

But come of it what might or would, Miss Clanbrassey, looking now at her watch, and perceiving with a shudder it was eleven o'clock, felt that she must dare all, to win or lose all!

But why did not her uncle go to bed? As a general fact, he hardly ever stayed up later than ten. And to-day he was fatigued with

visits, and with strong emotions suffered. Why did he not go to bed, that she might set out on her dreadful enterprise . . . and get it over . . . and secure, at whatever risk, from the living or from the dead, that baleful paper?

The word suddenly brought into Rosanna's mind—by I know not what inexplicable connexion—the letter she had received from Blackmore at the same time that he presented his notices to her uncle and Mr. Pendragon. What had become of the shreds of that letter which she had torn into pieces? For the first time the unhappy woman remembered she had not perceived any vestiges of the immolation on her return.

Could her uncle——. Scarcely able to draw breath at the idea which now entered her mind, Rosanna suddenly formed her resolve. She took off her boots, light of material as they were for dress—extinguished her candle carefully near a box of lucifer matches—and, so softly and soundlessly that it was a real wonder, on the part of a woman of such awkward stature and formation, stole downstairs to the door of the Cedar Parlour. She saw that it was only half

shut as she approached, possibly to guard against the very danger she was bringing thus. But its hinges were on the staircase side; consequently the shadow of the opening lay behind; and provided no disturbing noise was made, no one in the apartment would be likely to know he was observed.

No sound whatever had disturbed the deep stillness of the mansion in this part, when Rosanna Clanbrassey introduced herself into the shadow of this half-opened door, and looked within.

What did she see? Her uncle bending with the look of a puzzled chess-player over a multitude of little scraps, which he was endeavouring to piece together. Scraps of written paper! The scraps she had torn into fragments, and scattered over the floor of the Cedar Parlour, to avoid any detecting demand for a perusal of the letter from the bailiff, requiring her fulfilment of a *promise of marriage*.

It was evident Mr. Featherstone had not yet succeeded in his self-imposed task—and which he no doubt thought would throw some light on his perplexities.

Miss Clanbrassey determined he never should. She returned to her chamber as silently as she had descended, relighted her candle, threw off her day-dress, and flung on a dressing-gown, and with a loud, clear step, descended to the Cedar Parlour.

As she thus distinctly announced her approach, she heard a great shuffling and movement, and when she entered the apartment, all the scraps of the paper-puzzle had been swept off the table, in most "admired disorder," on to the floor. And there sat her uncle, looking as confused and guilty-like as if he had been detected in some great crime, and was awaiting the approach of an avenging justicer!

"Oh, is it only you, uncle? I was quite surprised hearing a noise below so long after we had gone to bed. I thought perhaps the windows had been left open, and that Neptune had got in among the glasses and china which Dobson said he should not put by till to-morrow. What are you sitting up for? And how pale and ill you look!" Miss Clanbrassey said.

"You don't look very well yourself, Anna dear! I was just going to bed. What non-

sense of you to trouble yourself about Neptune —he would never think of such a thing as coming into the house without orders. You have taught him his manners. I was busy thinking, and forgot the time—thinking all over this about Mr. Pendragon, you know, and —and that accursed bailiff! Did he order you off his land, also, in the letter he put in your hand?" inquired Mr. Featherstone, very unsteadily, and quavering under the stern sad eye fixed upon him as he spoke.

"Yes, sir—even me! who got him the lease which enables him to be upon it at all. But there was a great deal of insolence besides in the effusion—and that reminds me the pieces ought not to be left scattered about here for the servants to see: I'll burn them!" Rosanna replied; and kneeling, she began hurriedly to collect the paper tatters on the floor.

Mr. Featherstone seemed mechanically to stoop to assist in the effort, as if to prove his own innocence of any prying curiosity in the matter —putting the fragments, as he found them, in his niece's bed-candlestick, with a sort of open-handed gesture, as much as to say, "You see I

am concealing nothing." But on a sudden his eye was caught by a word—by two words—by three—on one of those large round-handed scrips —*breach—promise!—marriage!*

Involuntarily he repeated them aloud, gazing at Rosanna for an explanation. For only reply, she snatched them from him, and conveyed them at once to the flame of the candle.

"Haven't I told you the man was mad?—didn't you tell Mr. Pendragon the same yourself?" she muttered hoarsely, and with a glare of defiance and fury in her eyes that amazed—perhaps terrified—Mr. Featherstone.

"You go on very strangely, Miss Clanbrassey," he remarked, taking up his own candle. "I have heard that your grandfather, by the father's side, the famous rake of the Regency—Hell-fire Clanbrassey, as he was called—died a madman! I am not quite sure that the taint leaped over one generation; but I fear it is certainly alighting on the third remove. However, I shall see this bailiff of ours to-morrow early, and shall probably learn the full truth from his lips, when he finds I am resolved to keep no further measures with him of any sort. But as

that will be rather a public sort of an audience, perhaps it would be advisable for you to tell me beforehand whether I had better persevere in the plan or not."

"Persevere—persevere, sir!—I give you full permission. I am not mad; but I wish I were, since you suspect—since you treat me with such cruel distance and distrust. I defy whatever the man can say, or do, against me, before you, and all mankind—to-morrow."

"If it be so, good-night from the dearest depths of my heart, my poor Rosanna. We will be rid of this fellow, and all will be well again, and many, many happy years may be before you yet, with the husband of your choice. Good-night, and God bless you, my dear child!"

And so saying, Mr. Featherstone—usually so impassible and reserved in his manner—threw himself on his niece's neck, and burst into an hysterical species of sobbing and tears, as he kissed her repeatedly with far more than even his old fond fatherly tenderness, when parting with her at nights. She did not weep, nor sob, scarcely even at all reciprocated the paroxysm of

anguish and love which thus overcame her kinsman. Feeling, perhaps, that if she gave way at any point, her whole structure of resolve and stoicism would fall in with a crash, and leave her too weak and powerless to effect the desperate purpose in her mind.

"You are overwrought, uncle, to-night," she said, coldly. "Do go to bed, or you will have no nerve for your work to-morrow; and you would not have our people, and the rascal himself, think you are afraid of him?"

"Certainly not; I will go to bed. Don't stay up long after me," said Mr. Featherstone, recovering from his emotion, and feeling strangely repelled—almost frightened—by the frigid, insensible manner of his niece. "Don't stay up long after me!" he repeated, singularly hesitating to go.

"Not long—only to get completely rid of this letter, uncle!—you will hear me follow you in a moment. But I'll look to the shutters first, and see if all is safe. We have had so much of the old plate out to-day, I think I shall take it up to my room, and—and lock the strong door on

myself at the end of the little passage, to make sure no robber gets at it!"

And so she did. That is to say, she carried up two baskets of plate at an energetic tramp past her uncle's door; which he could probably hear through all its thickness. And then she locked the strong door at the end of her own communicating corridor. Only she locked herself out—not in!

If her absence should be discovered, she thought, then it would only be supposed that she was in her chamber, and took no notice of external application in her sleep, so separated from the rest of the household as it was.

Then she descended again to the Cedar Parlour; startled, but not much, as she entered it, by hearing the great old hall clock, which was reputed nigh two centuries old—the masterpiece in timekeeping of a German artist who had done with time himself for something about that space—strike twelve with a dismal, shuffling, broken-harp-stringed-like whirr and burr. The clock seemed to have the asthma like the bailiff —Rosanna thought—and almost laughed aloud!

She now remembered that she had put off

her boots upstairs. To be sure they were unfit for her present purpose, which would take her tramping over rough roads, and wading a river-bed, and across the spongy moisture of the bog. Black satin boots were certainly ill-adapted for such a transit! Yet she felt unwilling to return either for them, or others, to renew the noise of locking and unlocking doors, and attract notice in that way to her doings.

In this perplexity her eye fell upon her uncle's Wellingtons (Mr. Featherstone always wore Wellingtons, in defiance of changed modes, and brass-laced inventions of post-reformed eras) which he had put off when his guests retired. He had a small foot for a man—Rosanna a large one for a woman. She made up her mind at once to put on these, and did so with very little trouble. Then closing the parlour door and putting out her light, she groped her way rather awkwardly to a window and opened the well-secured shutters. Old Dobson was as jealous as anyone need be of the dangers to the family plate, after a grand display, in that rather lonely country house.

Withdrawing a fold of the shutters then, Miss

Clanbrassey was startled even with the effulgent burst of moonlight which greeted her from a broad yellow harvest moon, now climbing almost directly over the house. Everything seemed lighted up as if by a sadder day—even the black yew tree in the middle of the courtyard showed like a child's Christmas-tree in the glisten of the leaves, behung with chandelier-like drops of dew.

Rosanna felt immediately that in her white cashmere robe she would become a most noticeable and distinct figure wherever she went in that strong beam. It was unlikely, but she certainly might by accident come upon some stray villager, or other night-wanderer like herself. She would thus attract the most immediate attention, which she would find it impossible to elude in any covert, with that betraying white glaring in the moonlight, retire as much from any chance observation as she might. To be sure, she might be taken for an apparition in that superstitious and haunted country-side. But that was a security of very doubtful reliance indeed!

Suddenly she recollected that her uncle's great

grey plaid was almost always left hanging in the hall, ready for him to sally forth, wrapped against the weather, whenever he chose. That and his shady wide-awake would give her an appearance at a distance of some gamekeeper or shepherd out on legitimate business connected with the duties of either office. Her tall stature gave her also a manlike appearance. No sooner had she formed the notion than she executed it.

Stepping out of the window then, she carefully drew the shutters after her as close as she could to the panes, and closed it to prevent the intrusion of any unusual draught of air or noise; and then found herself suddenly almost knocked down by the impetuous caresses of the huge mastiff in the courtyard, which probably mistaking her for a moment for his master, heaped on her this rough fondling. But as rapidly discovering his mistake he drew off, and began growling and showing his terrible teeth, until with an imperious gesture and ejaculation, "Down, Neptune, down!" the animal seemed to admit Miss Clanbrassey's right to be there, and even slunk off in dismay to his kennel, as if

he recognised one whose severities of discipline he had experienced.

She was thus rid of further trouble with the mastiff, but felt an uncomfortable doubt whether she had not been obliged to raise her voice so loudly as to challenge observation within the house. Still, after listening for several minutes —no sound reaching her ear—and impelled by the desperation of her circumstances to discard fear, Miss Clanbrassey resumed her terrible excursion. She crossed the court, unbarred the massive door—only secured by one careless bolt—closed it behind her, and on the still undertoned-growling dog, and found herself on a pathway at the top of the deep precipitous valley below the hill which sheltered the ancient manor-house; and, after a winding course along its summits, allowed you at pleasure to turn into the principal avenue leading to it, or into the wild and little-used road across the park towards the sea and Moss.

To Rosanna herself it ever afterwards appeared like the phantasmagoria of a fearful dream, all that she passed through that night. There was something weird and supernatural in the pro-

digious and yet soundless rapidity with which she passed along the illuminated ridges of the Scaur. She seemed to herself to glide, not walk; and she became for the first time conscious, as it were, of the ground, and of the use she was putting her limbs to, in speeding over it, when more than a mile of moonshiny open uphill and down-vale pasture-lands were left behind, and she entered under the black motionless shadows of a pine-wood bordering both sides of the way, with a thick underwood of bramble and fern, which she knew straggled downwards rapidly to the watery maze where Featherstone Beck spread itself, like the thongs of a whip, into numerous channels; lost in the general boggings beyond to the eye, but doubtless finding its way, by tricks and windings of its own, to the kindred washings of the Mersey on its shore.

Utter silence reigned around. There was no wind; and only a strong wind ever stirred the stark-stretched branches of that dismal wood. The distant oozy murmur of the flowing tide could scarcely be said to disturb the silence. Rather it harmonized with it, and made a

part of the monotonous stun of noiselessness.

She reached the water. And here, for the first time, it was that Miss Clanbrassey ventured to stop for a moment, and draw breath. For the first time, in fact, being aware with what a frightful pant her heart beat. But even as she made this momentary pause, and brushed off in quite a shower the hot dews gathered on her brows, it seemed to her startlesome, guilty soul that she distinguished remote footsteps as if in pursuit! Certainly, most certainly, the distant, hollow moan, rather than bark of a dog, came to her hearing; and with a shudder she strove to recall to mind whether she had properly closed the gateway-door against the possibility of being followed by her uncle's mastiff.

She could not remember; but it seemed so improbable she should have neglected so necessary a precaution, that she fell at once upon considering whether the whine of the animal, vexed to find itself shut up behind her steps, could reach her over the distance she had traversed.

It did not seem likely, but it was not impossible. What was certain, however, was that

she ought to put her great business out of danger of interruption as speedily as possible—and on she went.

On, on, on! It was wonderful with what precision and steadiness, in crossing the ford—if so it might be called—the desperate woman stepped from stone to stone, carefully avoiding to wet her boots in its black ooze, until she reached the opposite side, and set her feet upon the darksome heath of the bog. After that, the windings of the Moss still continued familiar to her, and she knew she could traverse them with ease, under cover for the most part of hillocks of furze and bushy wastes, traversed by trenches and sunk peat-holes, dangerous to a stranger, but not to her. Moreover, the bog being chiefly in the hollow of an elevated piece of tableland, stretching thence to the sea-shore, the rest of the track lay for the most part in shadow and obscurity below.

There she should be safe from observation; or, if observed, Rosanna smiled darkly to herself to think that very possibly she might be mistaken for the apparition of the suicidal gamekeeper of Hang-Dog Hut, which was currently

reported in the village to haunt the scene of his disastrous close. Yet she could not prevent herself, on emerging on the waste, from glancing upward at the lonely Fir Tree, where she had stood with Mr. Pendragon, and for the first time in all her life listened to the music for which her whole life had pined—the offering of a sincere and manly and high-souled love that had no need to seek and scorned all subterfuge and concealment, not only to its object, but to all the world beside.

And what did Rosanna discern—or fancy she discerned—up there—which suddenly checked the violent beating of her heart, as if with the icing touch of death?

Distinctly visible in the strong yellow downpour of the moonlight, she perceived, as it were, the bronze statue of a horse, fastened by the bridle to the solitary tree, and vainly attempting to reach down to crop the herbage at its feet. The lustre of the moonlight, in fact, produced the proportions of the animal in clearer outline than the full broad beam of day; and there could be no mistake that a horse it was, saddled, bridled, and stirruped, and left there apparently

by some dismounted rider, who did not anticipate an immediate return. Who must, indeed, have been for some time already absent from his steed, since it had found time to make efforts at a meal.

The appearance of a horseman upon that lonely tract of country would at any time have been most unusual and remarkable; and Rosanna could only conjecture to herself that there must have been a hunting party from which some rider had strayed by extreme ill-luck into this wild territory, and finding it dangerous to proceed on horseback, had dismounted to inquire or search out his way. If by some climax of disaster to herself he should be attracted by the appearance of the remote hovel! To be sure, it would be very difficult for a stranger to make a successful transit over that almost pathless bog! But still it was a most threatening possibility, and to be provided against with every possible expedition. And with this conviction, Rosanna resumed her route with a headlong rapidity that if she had not been familiar with every step. and avoided its dangers as by instinct, would soon

have brought her own advance to some disastrous estoppage.

I scarcely know whether it was a fortunate circumstance for Miss Clanbrassey that the notion never once crossed her mind of Mr. Pendragon being the owner of this fastened-up steed, returned on a midnight gallop from Liverpool, determined to ascertain the meaning of the strange circumstances he had witnessed, and the suspicions raised in his mind, in a direct personal interview with the occasion of them! It seemed a thing so out of all calculation of misfortune! So unlikely even with a man of the sturdiest nerves, after all Mr. Pendragon had heard of the bloodthirsty desperation and craziness of Bailiff Blackmore!

But there are some men whose resolution is only roused to more indignant self-assertion by the notion of personal danger attached to any demand upon it. Mr. Pendragon was one of these.

Undreaming, however, of this climax to all her calamities, and only seeking to obviate the lesser one she apprehended, Rosanna resumed her fearful way to Hang-Dog Hut. Heedless,

henceforth, of whether her figure could be discerned or not—or what kind of identity might be imputed to it—she rushed forward over the marshy waste, and by a winding path up a rocky acclivity, speedily reached the platform, corresponding to Lone Fir Scaur, on which the equally solitary hovel stood.

As she moved off to resume her disastrous journey thither, again Rosanna more unmistakeably than ever distinguished the hoarse bay of a dog following in the distance on her track. It alarmed her even amidst the complication of her other terrors, and added wings to her speed.

But, heaven and earth! as she approached she perceived but too plainly that the door of the lonesome abode, where death and murder must by this time fully have done their work, was wide open! Not only did the glare of the moonlight show it so, but from within there came the red glow of a low fire of peat smouldering on the hearth.

As there was no fastening to the door in general but a latch, unless when a wedge was driven over it, within or without, there had been no difficulty for anyone to open it; and in this

latter case Rosanna was aware of a peculiar trick, by lifting the door on its hinges, to remove the obstruction. All was, however, now done to her hand, and the spectacle she beheld in gazing into the hut was surely punishment enough even for her dire offence!

Rigid and bolt upright in his chair before a small table, strewed with papers, account-books, and some coarse articles of diet, sat Bailiff Blackmore—evidently a corpse, by the ghastly pallor of his fixed countenance and the unmeaning glassy glare in his eyes, visible in the flicker of a lamp, formed by a wick in a cracked jelly-pot of grease, which was fast dying out beside him. And gazing in breathless horror at him, and at a paper partially written over, on which the dead man seemed to have been tracing some pencil marks as he became fixed in the immovability of death, stood Mr. Pendragon, of Pendragon Mohr! And Rosanna Clanbrassey knew by the instinct of despair that the open paper before her dead enemy, which Mr. Pendragon was endeavouring to peruse for some explanation of the horror he witnessed, was her Promise of Marriage to the wretched man--the ink of the

signature hardly yet dry, and the attesting date of some five hours' back interview before him!

With a wild shriek Rosanna turned to fly, but found even her flight barred by the sudden emergence on the scene of Mr. Featherstone and his huge dog! Mr. Featherstone was only dressed in his trousers and shirt; he had on no boots—no coat—he looked like a madman in every other respect—his hair erect—his eyes starting out of his head! It was the mastiff, however, that stopped the unfortunate woman by its furious bark and raging advance direct in her path.

Mr. Featherstone had scarcely strength to tug the creature back by the collar, as he exclaimed, "Great God! Rosanna! is it you—here—at midnight—at the villain's badger-hole?"

But she had none to reply! All the might of that powerful spirit had deserted the unhappy woman in so overwhelming a combination of disasters, and she sunk senseless on the ground at her uncle's feet; the last sounds she heard, with any meaning or sense attached to them, for many weeks after, being Mr. Pendragon's exclamation from the hut—"Good God! Mr.

Featherstone, is it you? What horror is this? A Promise of Marriage from your niece to the dead man here, endorsed in the agonies of death with these words: 'I am dying. She has murdered me to marry her new lover, Mr. Pendragon. . . Took my laudanum bottle upstairs under pretence. . . Prussic acid. . . My poor old mother. . . Murder! Murder! Murd . . !'"

CHAPTER XI.

THREADS IN THE FLYING WOOF OF TIME.

MADAME the Countess de la Mazurka had returned to Liverpool with her companion still more incomprehensibly silent and reserved than ever; herself more disgusted and weary than she had been in all her life together before, with the country, and country people, and countrified ways, in general, and in particular, and in every sense.

It is a strong expression, but I use it; considering that this Parisienne-English woman was born, I should imagine, with a dislike for the solitary, the silent, and the rural of all sorts. I was going to say, for all that was natural and quiet. But it must be admitted that much of

what had occurred on her visit to Featherstone Haugh did not come under that description, even to her superficial observation. But then, again, all she had witnessed had puzzled her like an enigma for a solution, and though her curiosity was much excited, she could not bear to fatigue her brains with vain attempts to fathom the mystery.

Scarcely disguising her indignation and disdain, she set down Mr. Pendragon at a street near his hotel, by his own particular desire, after a slight apology for not completing the journey to Liverpool Palace. But the rest of the way thither was lined with houses, and so public a road that no farther need of protection could be assumed, and Mr. Pendragon announced himself to be unusually fatigued with the day's excursion.

"You cannot be more so than I am!" replied the Countess, maliciously, and adding: "but you have surely made the journey worth your pains, by its favourable results to your future happiness, Mr. Pendragon, in my sister's acceptance of your extremely desirable proposals. As for her ailments, they are evidently only of a

temporary nature, from the extreme violence of the remedies she adopts!"

"Let me beg of you, madam, to make no mention of this affair until it is definitely arranged —for your sister's sake!" Mr. Pendragon replied, with emphasis; apparently explaining his remarks, after a short pause, by the addition, "Mr. Featherstone has not yet given his consent in form, and you have yourself informed me how extremely averse he is to the notion of marrying his favourite niece, and companion for so many years—at all!"

But Madame de la Mazurka was not the woman to take a reasonable hint of the kind, and she hastened with her full budget of news and grievances, to pour the whole into the sympathizing bosoms of the Featherstone opposition at Liverpool Palace.

The chiefs of this faction did not concern themselves much perhaps over Philippina's account of her shamefully neglectful reception by her uncle. But it excessively annoyed both Mr. and Mrs. Marrynett to find that their magnificent "turn-out," in the equipage way, had not extorted a single word of admiration from the

" glumpy old Squire." And the former was, in secret, bitterly vexed and mortified to find that even the birth of a Son and Heir had not diminished the rancorous old grudge borne to him by the county gentleman, nor secured him any overtures to a reconciliation. Under these circumstances he smiled grimly to hear that Mr. Pendragon had proposed to the Squire's favourite niece, and would doubtless be accepted, as the two " strange old fellows' " ideas and opinions went as pat with each other as globules of quicksilver. And yet, the Countess had not the common sense and feeling for her sister to conceal the extraordinary facts relating to Bailiff Blackmore's refusal to part with his stewardship, or leave the Featherstone property. Nay, she repeated his remarkable expression that he would never leave it unless with Miss Rosanna Clanbrassey as his bride, and described the whole singular scene after dinner in the Cedar Parlour. To all which Mr. Marrynett listened with greedy ears, and concluded with a commentary that startled even the mischievous reporter.

" Hang it! any man of the world can see how the wind blows among all this straw and

chaff; and if I don't put Pendragon up to my views about Featherstone's old maid and her bailiff, call me a d—d good-natured fellow to my enemies, and a d—d bad 'un to my friends! He shan't walk into a marriage like that, quite blindfold, either! I'll give him my ideas on the subject first time we meet again! And, perhaps, they haven't told him the estate's entailed, and are gammoning him into biting at a bare hook. I'll put him up to that, too!"

Mrs. Marrynett herself was a good deal annoyed and put out by the indiscreet fulness of her sister's revelations.

"Upon my word, Flippy! you need not have told all that stuff to Mr. Marrynett! You might have left our side of the family some vestiges of respectable connexion! What will he begin to think of us all just now, do you fancy? After the annoying things that idiot girl, Marrynett's daughter, gave out about the little boy, too? However, Marrynett is fonder of it than ever, whereas I really don't like it at all! I was going to say, as Primmer isn't here, I positively dislike it! It is the perfect ruin of all my girls for the great matches I intended,

unless you manage something for Adelaide. But, thank goodness! that clerk-fellow and his gawky have arranged, I hear, to get married as soon as possible on their fifty thousand pounds, and go on a wedding tour to Australia. Where, I hope truly, they will remain till I send for them home again!"

The love of gossip, however, hindered Madame the Countess from appreciating any harm in her chit-chat from the Haugh for some time after. But Mr. Marrynett himself had speedily occasion to find that the projected alliance between his sister-in-law and fellow-speculator was not likely to work in a way to increase his influence with the latter gentleman. Mr. Pendragon called upon him at his office, and definitively declined borrowing any more money of him upon his remaining mountainous territory, in order to extend his liabilities in the mining scheme.

He looked so pale and ill, and yet spoke with such determination on the point, that Mr. Marrynett was seized with a not unreasonable notion that the Welsh chieftain suspected his ultimate designs upon his property, and had been put up

to the withdrawal, and the mistrust he evinced, by Mr. Featherstone's malicious interpretations and expositions of his own ideas of his character and objects.

Highly exasperated at this conviction, and at the recalcitrance of his intended victim, Mr. Marrynett thereupon directly expressed his conclusions as to the reasons of his friendly co-speculator's shyness and withdrawal, which would go far to endanger the whole speculation. It needed a constant propping in the market, he asserted, for a time, until some great discovery was made of the ores so convincingly demonstrated to exist in the Pendragon Mohr, when shares would fly to the skies at once. But as Featherstone had behaved so un'ansome by him, and tried to prejudice his friend against him—still he was too much that friend's friend to see him trapped into a marriage with a girl that was spoken of as that Haugh "old girl" was all over the country side, for taking up with a dirty old Scotch bailiff, and playing into his hands until the stupid Squire had scarcely any ownership left over his own property! To be sure, she might now repent of her folly, have

taken a fancy to have a gentleman for her husband, or to quiet her uncle's just resentment and suspicions; but for his part—from all he heard——

But there Mr. Pendragon interrupted these unkinsmanlike reflections by informing Mr. Marrynett—turning deadly pale as he spoke, either with anger or some other emotion—that he was entirely mistaken in all he had stated. That Mr. Featherstone had only spoken of him (Mr. Marrynett) personally to praise his great business abilities, and had made no allusion whatever to any unfair designs or underhand proceedings of any sort to be apprehended from him. Only Mr. Pendragon's short experience of business, and business people, had convinced him that he was quite unfit and incompetent to figure in the transactions they conducted to advantage, and if it were possible he should be happy to retire altogether from the speculative pursuits he had engaged in—probably too deeply to do so at once. But for what related to Miss Clanbrassey, he begged Mr. Marrynett to understand that he would never suffer a single word to that lady's disparagement to be uttered

in his presence without calling the calumniator to a severe account! And all the more emphatically, since her acceptance of an offer he had honoured himself by making her was a sufficient refutation of any such absurd reports as seemed to have reached the ears of Miss Clanbrassey's relatives in Liverpool. Although, he was deeply grieved to add, Miss Clanbrassey had been induced, by her uncle's unwillingness to part with the main comfort and support of his old age, to retract her consent and definitely to decline his proposals. But certainly not on account of a wretched, embezzling man-of-business person like this Bailiff Blackmore, since he had the best authority for believing that the wretched fellow had committed suicide, on finding his employers were determined to have his accounts thoroughly investigated, and to turn him out of his situation, whatever expense and trouble it might cost them—Miss Clanbrassey quite as much as the Squire himself, who was as indignant as a man could possibly be at the tyrannous misbehaviour and proceedings of his servant towards himself and his tenantry.

This conversation took place on the day after

the visit to Featherstone Hall of the Countess and her undevoted squire of dames. And Mr. Marrynett, having been away from his home all the morning, had not heard a word about this alleged suicide, and he was much surprised to hear of it. Sufficient time had, however, been allowed for Mr. Pendragon to receive despatches containing the truths he announced since the discoveries in question had been made. For on his return, Mr. Marrynett found his wife and Madame de la Mazurka speculating over an article in the "Evening Mercury" which mentioned, in a cursory manner, that a Mr. Abednego Blackmore, bailiff and land-steward to Ferdinand Featherstone, Esq., of the Haugh, had been found dead in a small cottage he inhabited alone, on the verge of the extensive marshes known as the "Moss." In a rather remarkable manner also, as Mr. Featherstone, being very much discontented with the conduct of the deceased in the above capacities, had determined to try his right to the land he occupied under an alleged agreement with himself as proprietor, by ejecting him from the abode he had taken possession of against his declared

wish, and had made up a party of his tenants and servants for the purpose. But on the arrival of this company, the unfortunate man was found dead. A medical man who was called in gave it as his opinion that he had died of an overdose of laudanum, to which the bailiff was declared to have been excessively addicted, as a palliative to a disorder in the chest to which he was subject. And as there was no evidence to the contrary, though strong suspicions were at first entertained, very serious defalcations having been detected in the accounts of the deceased with his employers, the jury had returned a verdict to that effect.

Nor were the public in general ever very much more enlightened on the subject by the persons who alone were qualified to clear up the mystery.

The only food for conjecture offered to the nearest observers—if the villagers at the Haugh could be styled so—lay in the fact that Miss Clanbrassey was taken ill, and remained so for several weeks after the event described, of a brain-fever. Not, however, solely on account of the agitation and concern she had shared in

this uncomfortable affair, but from a circumstance which it was found impossible to conceal —namely, that she had taken to walking in her sleep whenever she was unusually excited; and being rendered particularly so by the visit of a sister and a friend whom she had not seen for a long time, had strayed abroad on the very night of the bailiff's catastrophe, in a most extraordinary costume, and caught a dreadful cold. But the concussion of the brain which produced her fever was traced by the doctor employed—a very learned man—to the unhappy circumstance that Mr. Featherstone, accidentally overhearing his niece at her preparations to go out (she actually put on her uncle's boots and plaid, and opened the parlour shutters fast asleep!), had followed and overtaken her on a midnight ramble on the very verge of the precipitous "Scaur," and in his alarm had incautiously thrown himself upon and awakened her too suddenly.

It was natural of Mr. Featherstone to put the best varnish he could on the unhappy events; but I doubt if any but a Welsh gentleman would have taken his share in the risk, and per-

haps conscientious objections, that might exist to the concealment of the real facts of the case. But, after all, the bailiff's pencilled denunciation of his unfortunate mistress as his murderess might not have been true, and Mr. Pendragon probably gave the lady the benefit of the doubt when he handed it over to Mr. Featherstone, and watched, without resistance, what ensued—that the Squire put it into the low peat fire on Bailiff Blackmore's hearth, and burned it till not even a black floating shred could remain. And having once accepted this compassionate ignoring part, Mr. Pendragon had only to stretch his conscience a little further, and cover the ignominy of the woman whose very crime towards another demonstrated the excess of her preference for himself, and preserve from total wreck and despair a man whom he esteemed, by giving the plausible explanation of his withdrawal with which he favoured Mr. Marryncott.

Still no doubt the whole affair exercised a most painful and harmful effect on Mr. Pendragon's mind, and continued to persecute him with misgivings as to the morality and right of

the course he had pursued, until other disorders combined to overwhelm him; and he did in reality in the end commit the act which he had assisted in fathering upon Bailiff Blackmore. On the complete failure and collapse of the great Pendragon Mohr mining speculation, after an expenditure of enormous sums to open it out (water, from an unknown source, burst in, and entirely destroyed the works), and when Mr. Marrynett's own necessities (so he said) had obliged him to foreclose his extensive mortgage on the Pendragon property, Mr. Pendragon shot himself dead at an inn in Carnarvon, on his way to London for legal advice on the subject.

And, perhaps, it would be as well to continue out to a conclusion here the story of the unhappy "old maid aunt" of the Miss Marrynetts; especially as it has little further connexion with their experiences; nothing remaining for report henceforth but the slow catastrophe of that sombre tragedy of an existence.

Was it the skill of her physician—the strength of her constitution, in which life was planted firmly as the gnarled roots of the oak in a stony soil—the unwearied care of her uncle—or the

vengeance of heaven on a great crime—that restored Rosanna Clanbrassey, after a fearful struggle with the destroying agencies at work within her, to the intolerable sense of all she had been, and was, and must be, to the close of her dismal days?

For even the refuge of Madness, which her uncle silently prayed for on her behalf, was denied to the strong-brained woman, whose intellectual powers had been so unnaturally developed and fed at the expense of all the more womanly part of her nature, which might have preserved her from disgrace and crime so unwomanly in its whole origin and end.

That mercy of madness was not granted to the unfortunate Miss Clanbrassey—even for her uncle's sake alone to be wished, whom it might have spared the still more terrible and gloomy ordeal awaiting him in the conscious society of a woman stained with such offences, and whose every thought was darkened by the perpetual shadows of a woe and of a guilt so terrible, though not otherwise expiated before an earthly tribunal.

The verdict of the jury in Abednego Black-

more's case threw suspicion on no one, unless upon the unfortunate deceased himself. He was safely buried in a churchyard noted for its quick destruction of the mortality confided to its keeping, at a distance from Featherstone. No friends or relatives stepped forward to claim a right to pay him any funeral honours, or to inquire too narrowly into the circumstances of his sudden doom. Not even to demand his inheritance.

To be sure this was a very slight one—and was so advertised in the Scotch and English papers. Of all the considerable savings he had boasted to Miss Clanbrassey, not a trace was to be found. Mr. Featherstone carefully searched the papers of the defunct, to find some clue to his connexions (why else?) in order to hand over to them the few personal articles of any value that were in the bailiff's possession at his death. But he made no discovery, with the single exception that he lighted on a parchment in a crabbed Scotch law handwriting, which proved to be a decree of separation, a mensâ et thoro, of one Abednego MacAnguish from his wife, Janet Moffat, on charges proved to the satis-

faction of the High Court of Justiciary in such cases, in Edinburgh, of gross cruelty (of a dreadful description, shutting her up to starve her), and desertion; and amercing him in a certain small annual payment for her maintenance. Where, the decree made no mention; and it was left entirely to conjecture whether the Scotch wife was alive or not at the time when the audacious bailiff, under a changed name, so outrageously urged his suit with the English lady in the south. The probability besides remaining, that he had fled to England to avoid the small reparation he had been ordained to render to his previous lawful victim in his native land.

Would this be a consolation for Rosanna to learn, or an increase of her dread calamity?

Mr. Featherstone, while bestirring himself with a wonderful degree of nerve and resolution, in the midst of his niece's first sufferings, to provide against any awkward pieces of evidence that might remain at Hang-Dog Hut, came to no opinion or decision on this point. But for this apprehension it is likely enough he would have left the bailiff's catastrophe to the discovery

of somebody else, or of accident, however long either had taken about it. The longer the better, for disconnecting Miss Clanbrassey's midnight sortie with the disastrous coincidence at the Hut. But it required all his own exertions, with the assistance of Mr. Pendragon, to convey his unconscious kinswoman to a sufficient distance from the place to establish an alibi, and where it would seem likely a somnambulist might have reached. Nor did Mr. Featherstone at all wrong the memory of his departed servant when he plainly intimated to the coroner, that he believed he had committed serious defalcations in his accounts. A very slight scrutiny sufficed to establish this fact, for the villanous bailiff, secure in his influence over Miss Clanbrassey, who alone examined them, had taken to plunder his receipts quite openly, and almost made a jest of the pretence of fair book-keeping, in striking his balances, by the impudent charges he made on his own side of the account, to adjust it as he thought proper.

At first, indeed, there seemed a great likelihood that the direful species of oblivion, or jugglery of reality, that madness offers to the over-

wrought intellect might become the portion of Rosanna Clanbrassey. For a long season a frightful raging delirium accompanied the fever on her brain, during which it required the strength of several persons even to keep her in her bed. Her uncle, the doctor, Mrs. Ullathorn, and Mrs. Ullathorn's vigorous young relative, were at times over-matched almost in the effort. And it was somewhat singular, but, in spite of the great need of female assistance for a woman in such a deplorable condition, Mr. Featherstone would not suffer any of his niece's relatives of that sex to be sent for from Liverpool. He rejected a suggestion to that effect with a kind of shudder of impatience and dread. "They are the most frivolous wretches in the world, my niece's female relatives, one and all!" he exclaimed. "They would kill her off at once —they would be studying grimaces at their toilettes, or wondering when dinner would be ready, if the entire universe, except themselves, were in its last agonies! They would be bringing some fashionable assassin of their own with them, too, Prendergast, who would laugh at your village skill! Do I neglect my niece, do you

think? Do you? And do this worthy woman and her gentle-hearted girl leave anything to be desired in the way of attention?"

In truth, no tenderness, no zeal, no devotion, could equal that of Mr. Featherstone himself in his efforts to preserve his niece, while his own reason assured him she would be better dead. But, besides every other objection, Rosanna's ravings were frequently not of a kind he could bear to run the risk of interpretation by those "Liverpool hags!" That was how he spoke of Miss Clanbrassey's charming sisters there. And certainly they would not have implicitly obeyed his wishes, as the Ullathorns did, in leaving the room whenever his niece began to babble strange matters, or to shriek them aloud with her uncle's quivering hands pressed on her burning lips in vain. They would probably only have listened the more resolutely, and have endeavoured to piece the fragments of meaning into some confessing whole.

Even the milder forms of Rosanna's distraction were of a terribly suggestive character. During the intervals of exhaustion that followed on some of her severer struggles an extraordi-

nary range of fancies seemed almost always to arise in her mind, and possess her with the notion that the reason of her being in bed, and surrounded by those anxious faces, was that she had become the wife of a beggar-man well known in Featherstone as "Tinker Tom," and was the mother of a child, murdered as soon as born by Mr. Featherstone, her uncle, because it was of so lowly parentage on the father's side, and disgraced its high connexions so! Mr. Featherstone had strangled it with his own hands, and thrown it down the "Scaur!" But he was so good and kind and loving an uncle that no proceedings were to be taken against him on that account. Hanging was so dreadful a death—so mean, so base a death—would they subject the noblest gentleman in all the world to so miserable a fate? And then she would weep for hours, and clasp her hands, and kneel and implore of the kind women who attended her that they would never betray her dearest uncle, nor herself, nor "Tinker Tom," to the knowledge of people in this dreadful matter; but would let them all go as peaceably as they might to their graves. Only it would be proper to bury the poor child, and

the most out-of-the-way and lonely place in all the country-side was Hang-Dog Hut. She would take it there herself—bury it with her own hands—the first dark night they could find in the almanac! The moon was as bad as the horrid Liverpool gas-light, to show what people were doing. Therefore it must be a night when there was no fear of its shining out in that day-like manner as it sometimes did at harvest-time.

Strangely enough she seemed to remember exactly what time of the year it was, and the species of operations requisite in the fields at that season. But she never once alluded to Bailiff Blackmore, or to Mr. Pendragon, who had promised to return to have some grouse-shooting on the 12th of August. Unless on one occasion, when she begged her uncle to put two extra keepers on the Moss, to look after the grouse, as he wanted it this year for his friends; and one man alone, in such a place, was apt to go melancholy mad, and do himself a mischief!

At last the violence of the fever subsided, and Miss Clanbrassey sank into a species of

lethargy, during which it seemed that all the powers of existence were suspended in her, excepting the mere faculty of drawing breath. And for some hours even that was scarcely perceptible. The doctor announced a decisive crisis; and Mr. Featherstone awaited the result—a patient, grief-worn male Electra at the feet of an exhausted female Orestes, tormented by the furies of her crime—watching for the moment of crisis.

For whole days it was thus with the uncle and niece, and no one could even conjecture what was likely to be the upshot, so fixed in deathly repose, with eyes firmly closed, and motionless in every muscle of the large and once expressive face, the unhappy patient lay. The poor gentleman, her uncle, felt or fancied this miserable wreck was his own work—the deplorable result of a reversed Pygmalion art, to extract the natural warming fire from heaven out of the frame it was bestowed to animate, and make a statue of a living woman.

The task seemed literally accomplished now, and Mr. Featherstone accepted his punishment in the sad spectacle before him with a real passion of willingness to take his portion in the

misery endured, and expiate in his own person what he might of the crimes he believed he had caused by his mistaken system of education and rule.

But he was not prepared for what really happened when Rosanna—after apparently a long twilight glimmering in her returning faculties—opened her eyes once when Mr. Featherstone was thus alone with her, and looking at him steadily, said—

"Uncle, I am not mad! I shall never be mad, and I will never allow you to pass me off as a madwoman in the world, or send me to an asylum among other mad people, out of your way! You have made me, and what you have made me you shall enjoy. The moment you attempt to get rid of me—to drive me out of your sight and shelter—I will demand to be taken before a magistrate: I will appeal, if need be, to the persons whose office it is to visit lunatics, and I will confess all the crimes I have committed—they are more than even you guess. And I will demand to be led to the scaffold, and when the rope is about my neck I will denounce to the entire world you and your system, and you

shall descend to your grave almost as miserable and disgraced as myself, in the declaration of your insanity of selfishness."

When Mr. Featherstone could speak for astonishment, grief, and alarm, he assured his niece that he had not dreamed of deserting her in her afflictions—of removing her to any other place whatever than the home which had always been hers, and should be to the last hour of her life, if she so pleased.

"I know better," she replied, with savage emphasis, even in her weakness and prostration. "You think you will get rid of me somehow, and take up in peace and happiness with that blooming girl at the Gate, after having destroyed —blasted—a life so much younger than your own, as mine is, and condemned me to the terrible existence I know I must henceforth endure. For it is certain—spite of all the senseless philosophy and stoicism you have taught me—I have not courage to die, and must live on! But I will be the poison of your existence, as you have been the poison of mine; and you know now at what risk you shall

attempt at any time to free yourself of the burden of my presence and my miseries."

Mr. Featherstone thought at the time that his niece was still speaking under the influence of some lingering of her malady. But it was not so. Miss Clanbrassey really meant what she said, mad or sane, and carried out the programme with fearful fidelity. She remained in her uncle's house, after her physical disorder was supposed to be cured, the dark genius of his hearth, which banished all peace and comfort from it with the perpetual shadow of its silent gloom.

For she entered into no explanations with the unfortunate Squire after that brief and terrible announcement. It was only by her silence, indeed, that he could guess she remembered the dreadful past. But she evinced no disinclination —so he heard—to speak to other people about the disastrous end of Bailiff Blackmore. On the contrary, she inquired the minutest particulars of the Ullathorns, and seemed quite unconcerned at what she heard. Or, if concerned, joyfully so. "He was a terrible nuisance," she said. "He could not have done a kinder thing

to us all than to put himself out of the way in the style he did. My uncle was getting angry with me on his worthless account. I allowed him so much power, foolishly enough, but fancying he was so clever and—and honest! But now that breach is healed also, and uncle and I were never better friends."

Yet Mr. Featherstone himself, before very long, began to have a vague shadow of apprehension stealing over him, that he had become an object of mute but rancorous distaste and aversion to his niece. It is true she exacted almost constant companionship from him—hardly suffered him for a long time to be half an hour out of her sight at a time; but when in his company always spoke to him with disdain and asperity, as if she were the bitterly injured and unoffending party of the two.

"You have made me so strange a being—so curious and outlandish in my manners, being brought up in this village on the outskirts of the world—that I am unfit for any other society but yours, uncle!" she would say. "And I hate to be alone—I will not be left alone! Why do

you go so much to that stupid lodge-gate now? Is it to look at the senseless fair face of that girl there? For shame!—an old ~~man~~ like you, and who brought up a young woman like me—for I am not old even yet, uncle!—to despise everything but books and philosophy."

In truth, the unlucky Squire grew not to relish by any means those long dreary evenings of the winter that followed that fatal summer, caged in the darksome Cedar Parlour with a gloomy and unhappy woman, who, doing nothing and saying nothing, with large, hollow eyes steadfastly fixed on the piled-up fire in the grate, insisted on his being with her, but made no attempt—nor tolerated any—at friendly communion or discourse. In truth, Rosanna took no interest in anything among all the subjects that used once most to attract her attention, real or feigned. Politics, literature, etymological and scientific elucidations—nothing any longer seemed to have power to engage her mind. Only she would not be left alone. That was the sole burden of her lay. She would not be left alone. And Mr. Featherstone, dreading what the consequence might be if he presumed against his niece's wish in this

respect, became in a manner the bond-slave and captive of it.

As for any confidence longer existing between them, it was quite out of the question. Fancying, however, at last that the dreadful gloom in which his niece was continually immersed might be occasioned by remorse, Mr. Featherstone took it into his head he should diminish her feeling on the subject of the doom to which she had consigned her plebeian lover, by making her aware of all his unworthiness. He took an occasion, therefore, to throw out an allusion to him once to his niece, which he thought might awaken her curiosity, without venturing too nigh the dread core of her mystery.

"What a rascal that Blackmore was," he ventured one evening to observe to her, as he was affecting to turn over a bundle of the dead bailiff's accounts, "besides his cheating in the books he kept."

"Yes," she answered, quietly, "he sold Mopsy, our best milch cow, had it not been for the lame foot, for twenty-five pounds, and pretended he got next to nothing for her!"

"And besides that," said Mr. Featherstone,

hastily, "he had a wife in Scotland whom he had shamefully maltreated, and ran away from when he—when he——"

"——When he wooed and wanted to marry Miss Clanbrassey, of Featherstone Haugh: no circumlocution, uncle—we are alone. He paid pretty dearly for that audacity, however, uncle, as you are well aware. I poisoned him—put prussic acid—hydrocyanic acid, as we should call it in our learned way; but they put it plain on the bottle, there was no mistake: 'Poison—Prussic Acid'—in his laudanum! It could be easily proved still, if need were, by reference to the books of Hellebore and Sage, Pharmaceutical Chemists, Birmingham. You see I am mistress of my subject, if you provoke me to an exposition. If I had known that in time, however, it would have been a nice answer to the man's threat of bringing a suit for breach of promise of marriage against me! You saw the paper, uncle, I signed to that effect, and so did Mr. Pendragon, and it was kind and generous of him not to tell, I must say. But nothing can hinder a criminal from confessing of himself, and I bid you beware how you drive

me on the desperation of doing so. If you do not continue very kind and good to me—it is my only restraint—and watch over me, and keep me company always, I feel I shall be driven to do that, and all will come out then, and you will be shamed as well as I and poor Pendragon, before all the world."

On this basis Rosanna Clanbrassey re-erected a tyranny a thousand times more irksome than any she had ever before, in the fulness of her uncle's confidence and blind partiality, established for herself and the bailiff at Featherstone Haugh. That is to say, she resumed the management of everything in the house and about the place, even in a more high-handed and overbearing manner than she had previously, with her first return of strength, and the least opposition to her will seemed to irritate her to displays little short of the paroxysms of delirium she had exhibited at the height of her malady.

Perhaps, indeed, she was only superficially cured of that frenzied state of the mind. But she contrived in the end to make herself an object of mingled dread and dislike to her uncle, who found all his good intentions and sacrifices

taken for nothing, and his home become a place of terror and constraint to him of the most appalling and unhappy kind. No wonder, then, if the poor Squire escaped as often as he could from the shadow of the fearful Nemesis that had overtaken him; and when he dared, for a few stolen minutes, sunned himself into a calmer and gentler mood in the compassionate smiles and innocent homage of his under-bailiff's lovely young granddaughter, May Ullathorn.

But this deplorable condition of affairs was, fortunately for Mr. Featherstone, not destined long to last. Rosanna Clanbrassey's fury of resumed power and tyranny subsided the instant they were no longer resisted, and she perceived that she had achieved the result of rendering herself a mingled object of detestation and fear. This seemed, in fact, to have been her strange purpose during the efforts she had made to regain her old supremacy, to judge by the sudden collapse that followed on her success. After that, she neglected her regained empire as completely, and remained plunged in fits of the profoundest gloom and despair; abandoned all her occupations finally, and took to her room, and

then to her bed, without any apparent ailment, but with a fixed determination, which she made no efforts to conceal, of never rising again.

"I cannot keep up this farce any longer, uncle," she said to him one day, calmly and rationally enough to all appearance. "I am dead. What is the use of pretending not to be so? Order my coffin, and let us have no more fuss about the matter. I am weary, I tell you, of going about, and feigning to be alive. Put me into it, and bury me, and you shall see I will not stir hand or foot to oppose it."

And from this rooted fancy she could not be removed; and of a surety seemed to believe in it herself. For even when the news of Mr. Pendragon's suicide reached her—which it did through the doctor, who sought to arouse her attention by such a startling piece of news, and knew not how deeply the unhappy woman had once been interested in that gentleman—she did not seem either moved or excited by the intelligence. "There will be no one left to regret his beautiful wife now in the world!" she remarked only; "children seldom remember very much about a dead mother; and, besides, Mrs. Pen-

dragon died very young, a very long time ago! Doctor! I would rather have been the marble figure on Mrs. Pendragon's tomb than a throned and triumphant living empress! But I am condemned to a worse fate—to be alive—people around me at least persist in fancying I am alive, and will not bury me—while I am dead! Oh, so dead! all the time, to my certain knowledge and belief!"

It was in vain to reason with a settled insanity like this; and, moreover, the unhappy sufferer in a manner wearied out sympathy and condolence by her harsh and terrible and exacting demeanour, even while she thus maintained herself to be dead. She wearied out even the patient love and remorseful submission of Mr. Featherstone. His man's nature revolted against such excesses of caprice and self-attribution as were exhibited by his niece, in her voluntary confinement, and continual rabid outbursts of tyranny and control. Her very commands against and taunting accusations of his preference for the low-born loveliness of May Ullathorn, produced exactly a contrary effect from what seemed intended. And after awhile, Rosanna

Clanbrassey, abandoned to the care of hired attendants, seemed to lose her power to torment and appal her luckless relative altogether.

It seemed as if this only was wanting to complete the overthrow of all hope and energy to struggle against the influences of the extraordinary kind of existence to which Miss Clanbrassey now delivered herself up; hardly ever quitting her bed, speaking to no one, and finally refusing all food excepting bread and water. It was not found possible to change her resolution in this respect, and that, as she herself bitterly remarked, was in itself a great concession on the part of a person already dead!

She succeeded thus at last in breaking down the strength of her once iron constitution, and without at all diminishing the frightful violence and asperity which obliged all to flee from her but those whose duty compelled them to attend upon her. Without any definite or declared disease that medical skill could discover, a canker seemed to be in the core of Rosanna Clanbrassey's existence, fast wearing down her vital energies, and preparing things for general collapse and ruin.

Something might be due, indeed, to the action of the baneful drug in whose use she was once more indulged, in the latter stages of her malady. She complained so of utter sleeplessness, and Mr. Featherstone, aware now of the habits she had acquired, himself suggested to the doctor that she might be allowed the use of opium in unharmful proportions. But what are unharmful proportions in the use of a poison so destructive to the vital powers of man? and Rosanna's subtlety lay in this, that while by a discontinuance of nourishing food and diet she diminished the resisting strength of her constitution to the insidious operations of her drug, she was allowed to increase the quantities she took to calm the febrile action she exhibited, and the paroxysms of irritation and causeless resentment that drove (as has been said) all not forced to remain in attendance upon her from her side.

Mr. Featherstone had grown—if the truth must be told—considerably hardened to the deplorable nature of the case, and by no means so anxious as he had originally shown himself to be, about its probable disastrous consummation. Under the sway of his niece's menaces, he felt

that it would not be possible for him to remove the painful spectacle of degradation and woe for ever established apparently in his home. Nor ought it to be considered altogether a wonderful anomaly of human conduct and reasoning, that fleeing from the terrors of his niece's society and the remembrance of her misconduct, Mr. Featherstone had formed a project to restore himself to some degree of happiness and human association by doing what he would have condemned in any other person of his age and standing in the world to the uttermost. Yes; Mr. Featherstone of the Haugh—the proud Mr. Featherstone —the aristocratic county gentleman par excellence—had made up his mind so far to defy the opinion of the world, and fly in the teeth of all his most cherished principles and maxims, as to marry his under-bailiff's blooming daughter at the Lodge-gate!

There was no thought of anything else in his plans on the subject from the very first. His own notions were too honourable as regarded women—the girl herself was too virtuous—his purposes and wishes were too completely to restore himself to some species of domestic

happiness—to permit him to form any other projects. The ill success of his grand system had, perhaps, diminished his own respect for the ideas on which he had founded it. Besides all this, it must be said that May Ullathorn's beauty powerfully pleaded in her favour; her mildness and tenderness of temper—even her peasant ignorance and girlish simplicity, O heavens! pleaded with the trainer in languages and sciences of the unhappy Rosanna Clanbrassey. At sixty-five, Mr. Featherstone was aware that he was still a good-looking, hale man; and he had reason, besides any slight personal vanity of the kind, to conceive that he had awakened affection and admiration in his under-bailiff's charming daughter from the moment when he had first interfered in the protection of her family from Bailiff Blackmore's tyranny. Not to trouble one's self to seek too elaborate explanations of what, after all, is a simple enough result of given circumstances, and often enough observed as such, Mr. Featherstone made up his mind to marry young May Ullathorn as soon as ever—

As soon as ever what?

As soon as ever his niece, whom he had

brought up in maxims so opposed to his own example now, should come to the close of her distressing career, which the medical attendant announced as inevitable, if she persisted in the strange condition of existence she had embraced, and had evidently made up her mind not to change by any exertion of her own will, or sufferance of her own!

How intelligence of this fact came to the knowledge of Rosanna Clanbrassey it is hard to say. She was certainly incapable of gossiping elucidations of the kind with any of her attendants. The probability is that at some time when she was believed in a state of stupor, after some heavier dose than usual of her terrible medicine, Mrs. Ullathorn had been misled into the belief that she could neither hear nor understand whispered remarks, and might have indulged in discussing the prospects of her young relative with some one of the servants sharing her watch as nurse.

However that might be, it was perfectly plain that the unfortunate Miss Clanbrassey was aware of the arrangement, by the allusion she

made to it, in her dying moments, to Mr. Featherstone.

A few days before the 12th of August, one year after that fatal midnight excursion to Hang-Dog Hut, and about three months after Mr. Pendragon's own disastrous end, Rosanna was taken unusually ill shortly after the moon rose. A moon as bright as that which had guided her on her former terrible enterprise. She made a complaint to her nurse that she felt quite paralyzed on a sudden, observing that she thought the moonbeams must be frozen, she felt so deadly cold! And after a pause, she desired Mrs. Ullathorn to summon her uncle to her apartment—a request she had not made for a considerable time, nor had he volunteered visits which almost uniformly ended in some explosion of unreasonable passion, akin to the vindictiveness of a settled hatred, on his niece's part.

"Don't be afraid!" she said to Mrs. Ullathorn, perceiving her hesitate, "I am not going to say a word against the match! On the contrary. But be quick; I have no time to lose!"

The good woman, who was of a mild and placable nature herself, complied; but was so long gone that the unhappy mistress seemed to form her own conceptions of the cause, and when Mr. Featherstone at last unwillingly arrived, she said to him, "You come from the Lodge-gate, uncle?" But without any signs of anger and asperity on the occasion. Indeed, she smiled and looked much pleased as she made the observation. A smile such as she used to give her uncle when they met in the old happy—at least happier—times when they were all in all to each other—companions, fellow-students, and friends—with a touch of that finer sentiment of attraction and love always felt in the relations of the opposite sexes, even in cases of such near kinsmanship and consanguinity.

Mr. Featherstone was rather taken aback by the question, at the same time that he was surprised and moved by the return of the kindly expression to that countenance which he still, after all, perhaps, loved better than the lovely girlish visage which had caught his regards of late. In consequence he would have said some-

thing to remove what he thought must be an unpleasing reflection from the patient's mind. But he found it was not so. "I am very glad, uncle," Rosanna Clanbrassey said, quite softly and pleasantly, but waving to Mrs. Ullathorn to retire, "that there will remain some consolation with you. I am going now. I am struck with paralysis. I did not wish to alarm Mrs. Ullathorn, or to be plagued with doctors. It is a just punishment on me—a direct judgment of Heaven—for the deed I did with such power and energy of life and limb in speeding to my wickedness, exactly this night year ago. I have sent for you to bid you farewell, and to tell you—I had purposed—I had intended—I have been working up to the result ever since that fatal night—but I have not the heart, after all, to die, leaving my memory hated as well as despised by the being whom I have loved first and last in my life! I wanted you to believe, uncle dearest! that I was the most ungrateful as well as the worst of women—that my existence would be to you only misery and a despair as long as it was protracted. I wished to deprive you of all regret over my grave;

but I have not the courage to die so! And, therefore, I have summoned you to my death-bed, to ask and receive forgiveness, and to let you know the real motive of the insane harshness and cruelty and repulse of my conduct, even when I loved you most—felt the deepest gratitude for your heroic chivalry and endurance of such a wretch as I am to the close! Not many hours remain to me; for precisely at the minute when I quitted our house on my errand of horror a year ago I shall die this night!"

Mr. Featherstone was completely overcome by this unexpected address.

"My heart told me all along it was so!" he exclaimed, bursting into an effusion of tears and sobs, perhaps for the first time, of a relieving character, since that disastrous night. "It ought to break over my work, and it will—it does! But do not talk so despondently, my own dear niece! We will be happy again together if you will only consent to live, and this marriage—this marriage you so much dread—shall never take place, if it hurts any feeling of yours to think it will!"

"I have no feelings left, uncle, except for

you. Look: it is impossible for me to lift my arms to embrace you, but with all my soul I do; and your union with the beautiful and innocent girl who—— Perhaps you may yet live to have heirs to the estate of your own, and transmit your bright and generous name to posterity! I pray God it may be so, and, asking only your blessing for myself, am ready to depart!"

"It cannot—it shall not be! It is merely a fancy—a superstition on your part, Anna, my darling dear! Your paralysis even is purely imaginary, I am sure! You speak as calmly and clearly as ever I heard you in my life before!"

"I have no fancies, uncle, and no superstition! None, at least, of a fearful and overawing character. It was not the apparition of that murdered wretch—the hateful destroyer, whom I destroyed—that has appeared. I have seen Mr. Pendragon only, with his first wife, like a most exquisitely beautiful marble statue, leaning on his arm—standing by my bedside, with his other hand extended as if to lead me away. And he informed me that I was to complete my

expiation by dying to-night precisely, as I have said, when I started a year ago on my fatal sleep-walking! (She smiled very faintly, but very gratefully there.) The clock was striking twelve then; when it strikes twelve to-night I shall depart for ever from this home, which was once the home of all I loved and cherished in the world—your all-dear self, uncle! And it is the same now again! Among all living creatures I shall regret only you. Still I would ask you, as a dying favour, never for any reason or inducement whatever to abandon Philippina to utter poverty. She is capable, alas! of anything for want or vanity! She would have destroyed me, had I not destroyed myself, in pure wantonness of talk and mischievous frivolity!"

Mr. Featherstone made this promise as well as he could speak for emotion; and, still incredulous of the terrible fact his niece announced, or hoping that medical assistance might be of avail in her restoration, declared he would send for the doctor immediately, to ascertain if she was in reality in so alarming a state as she declared. But Rosanna so ear-

nestly implored he would not do so, and grew so excited at the notion, that he became alarmed at the consequences in that way also; and finally, at her earnest desire, consented at least not to send for Mr. Prendergast until the hour she had announced as her closing one should come. "And do not let them play me any such tricks as they did poor Lord Lyttleton—the wicked Lord Lyttleton, as they called him—I once read to you about, uncle, in that old work that amused us so on ghosts and apparitions. You remember it, no doubt; it was all of no use, you know, and was a kind of insult to the dying man!"

Mr. Featherstone yielded to this earnest entreaty; and seating himself by his unhappy niece's bed, they passed a very considerable time in the interchange of mutual confidences, and marks of the deepest restored love and affection. Nor could Mr. Featherstone discern any reason for Rosanna's startling statement of her condition, with the exception that she certainly remained very fixed and immovable in the position in which she had commenced the interview. Nor had she once raised her arms,

even when, observing her becoming as it were sleepy while he talked to her, he embraced her fondly, and declared that he would sit by her until she woke again, and that she would then, no doubt, be almost well again, since she was so much herself in all other respects.

"I shall never be well again, uncle," she said, in reply. "But I do feel very weary of all things—not of you. Good night! How strange that language you took so much pains how to qualify me in, should fail me now when I most need it to express all my love and gratitude to you! For, after all, I have never loved any one in the whole world but you. Even Mr. Pendragon I only loved because he was so like you—a noble gentleman! UNCLE, GOOD NIGHT!"

Those, I believe, were the last intelligible words of the ill-fated lady. She appeared after that to fall into an easy and comfortable sleep, with her uncle's hand laid upon her own, which he had himself drawn at her request from beneath the counterpane. He did not attempt any of the foolish trickery she had denounced, with the great hall clock. Indeed, he had for-

gotten the circumstance she had made the reason of her request, imputing her expectation of a release at that particular hour—apprehension it could not be called—to overwrought feeling, and, perhaps, too strong a dose of her sedative, which had given her the notion that she was paralysed. The clock accordingly struck as usual—as it had struck on the night when Rosanna Clanbrassey took her perilous excursion to the "The Moss." But precisely at the instant of its first stroke the unhappy lady seemed aroused from her sleep, and to Mr. Featherstone's speechless amazement and alarm, sprang quite into the middle of the floor from the bed, and moved at a singularly soft and breathless step towards the windows of the chamber, which were strongly lighted by the moonbeams only, in order not to cause the patient any disturbance with light. He himself rose at once to advance to restrain her wandering; but before he could reach the spot where she stood, she seemed suddenly to become powerless—to lose the use of her limbs—and sank upon the floor.

Mr. Featherstone summoned assistance by his outcries; but it was only to help raise the corpse

of his unhappy niece from the boards. She was dead—gasped her last breath at the last stroke of the great hall clock striking twelve!

* * * * *

Six months after that event, Mr. Featherstone of the Haugh, married his under-bailiff's daughter, to the prodigious astonishment of every one—but chiefly of the Marrynett family, who believed, not without some cause, that he had committed this derogation purely in spite to them. In another year his village consort presented him with a fine son and heir, and all expectations the Marrynetts might still have cherished, for additions to the marriage portions of their numerous girls, in that direction, finally vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

"AU REVOIR."

But for the precautions taken by Mr. Featherstone, and Mr. Pendragon's chivalrous reticence, Madame the Countess de la Mazurka might have done a good deal of mischief, in her light, gossiping way, in that sad affair of Bailiff Blackmore's sudden death. But the fact itself was all in connexion with the tragedy known with much certainty during the remainder of Madame's stay in Liverpool, which was longer than she had intended. Even the severe illness of her beloved sister at the Haugh, which followed so closely on that event as to be coincident with it, was most unjustifiably withheld from her relatives' knowledge, resident or visiting in Liverpool, by her uncle. Had Madame been aware

of that, nothing could have prevented the affectionate woman from hastening to the scene of sickness and sorrow, and collecting every scrap of information to be laid hold of on the subject. Of course, Rosanna's ravings in her brain-fever would have been invaluable in this respect, and might even have served for foundation, in such clever hands, for a still darker and more terrible mystery of scandal and horror. But Mr. Featherstone took care, as we have shown, that no one attended to his niece but himself in her communicative paroxysms.

What ill-natured prating could do, had already been done, in the way of mischief, by Madame de la Mazurka. She had described the singular scenes with Blackmore during her recent visit, which had enabled Mr. Marrynett to make his annoying onslaught on Mr. Pendragon. Nor had she omitted the adventure of the bottle of prussic acid. But she related this last only as an occasion to laud her own goodness and cleverness, in having purposely destroyed it before both gentlemen. For she frankly declared—quite boasted—that such was the case. Done with the best motives, no doubt, to put

her uncle on his guard against allowing so very favourite a niece to ruin her health by such violent remedies. And, with regard to Mr. Pendragon, really if Rosanna was so ill, and subject to disorders that required such terrible counteractives, it was a great shame of her to try and saddle the "poor old fellow" with an invalid wife, besides the likelihood that she would transfer her own and her uncle's money "all of a pop" out of her proper family into a stranger's. And also the Countess, who had been a contemporary of Madame Laffarge, beneficently declared that, badly as her uncle had behaved to her and all the family, excepting Rosanna, she did not like he should be ignorant that the said favourite niece dealt in such sudden means of getting at an inheritance! Especially under the suspicious circumstances of Bailiff Blackmore's extraordinary position with regard to her and the property.

So far the foolish woman had really very little idea or suspicion of the existence of cause for these black insinuations, but was piqued extremely at the Squire's visible dislike and contempt for herself, and the exclusive hold her

sister appeared to have gained on his affection, and last will and testament in consequence, no doubt. But even when the circumstances of the bailiff's death were declared, she could not forbear displaying her skill and science in the art of malignant equivoque, by expressing her fears that by some unlucky accident or other the bailiff's laudanum (to which he was declared to have been so addicted) and her sister's prussic acid might have got changed in the bottles, coming from Birmingham, whence she knew Rosanna got her drugs, and where she might have recommended Mr. Blackmore. Chemists were sometimes very careless people, even with their deadliest mixtures, and the least confusion in labelling, in such a case, might lead to a fatal mistake.

Mr. Marrynett, returning quite savagely out of temper from his discussion with Mr. Pendragon—who, he perceived was withdrawing himself as much as he could from his clutches—lent again a most attentive ear to his sister-in-law's remarkable comments. With the exception, indeed, that he would not admit the possibility of a mistake in the case. "No! if it's

been done, it's been done purposely. Prussic's the colour of water—laudanum's black!" he exclaimed. "Tell you what, Mrs. Marrynett! I don't know but that it would be my duty to go at once before a magistrate and put people up to make inquiries. Perhaps it wouldn't be too late yet to analyze the body, and see whether the man came to his end by his own mixture, or somebody else's help, or not! Featherstone deserves any annoyance, anyway, for his infamous behaviour to me and mine. Though I believe you consider I'm yours, and not you mine, on account of your grand family, forsooth! How would they look with one of them figuring at a hanging-match, I wonder?"

For once the son and heir of the Marrynetts turned up trumps. "How would your son look with an aunt that was hanged, when you have made a fine gentleman and a peer of the realm of him, as you talk about, I should like to know, Mr. Marrynett?" his wife replied with dry hard emphasis.

"It'll put you and I on a par about that convict fellow you're always throwing in my face, to prove my daughter stole your diamond

ring, Mrs. Marrynett!" replied Mr. Marrynett, who when he was grammatical was extra so.

"I'll never mention him again while I live if you will hold this absurd clatter about my sister Rosanna! And where's the use, Marrynett? Don't you yourself say Pendragon has broken off his suit with her, and consequently there could be no motive—no possible motive—for Rosanna—to—to get rid of this bailiff fellow? There's nothing impossible and unnatural you won't get to believe of us all at last!" Mrs. Marrynett passionately rejoined, with an allusion the Countess only vaguely comprehended, in conjunction with the curious hint given her by Adelaide a short time previously.

Mr. Marrynett, though both a county and a city magistrate, was no Lucius Junius Brutus, to execute impartial justice, strike as it might against his own affections or interests. Neither was there any tangible proof of unfair dealing with the bailiff to be taken up on public grounds, prompted by private hate. The jury had returned a verdict that Abednego Blackmore died by the incautious use of laudanum. No mention was made of prussic acid. On the whole,

Mr. Marrynett elected to take no further motion in the matter, though suspicions of a faint character might linger in his mind, that exerted influence in a matter much nearer to his own business and bosom, though at a somewhat remote period afterwards.

An apprehension in this last connexion of ideas it was that figured at the conclusion of Mrs. Marrynett's appeal for forbearance, which she seldom made in so gentle and polite a way. And ideas in general were evidently running on that string, for when, in private with the Countess, Mrs. Marrynett was severely rating her upon her folly in trying to bring down their family to the level of Mr. Marrynett's in the way of disreputable dealings, that lady rather sharply rejoined, "Well, upon my word I really do not understand you, any of you, in the least! But as to any harm I can do you, Mrs. Marrynett! by what you call my indiscretion, it is perfectly plain Mr. Marrynett considers the boy a good deal more his own than even yours! And I must say he shows ten times more a father's feeling for it, than you a mother's!"

Mrs. Marrynett was much surprised at this

observation, not being aware that, in the excess of her precautions against discovery of the real state of the case, Mrs. Primmer had given out that her step-daughter had reflected on the legitimacy of the son and heir solely as respected the parentage on the father's side. And by so doing certainly justified, in the eyes of all the gossips of Liverpool, the violence and rancour of hostility she had provoked against herself from Mr. Marrynett. That was a piece of malice, too, of a vulgar sort likely to take the popular ear, from a step-daughter to a step-mother under the circumstances. And, strange to say, when she had ascertained the meaning the Countess affixed to her words, and had derived from Miss Adelaide's information, the mamma remained nothing like so angry and uncomfortable as she had been made by the apparent insinuation in the first instance.

"I wonder whom I am supposed to have played the rover with, then? Dr. Primmer? I did not know of the man's existence till I went to Leamington to be confined! And he has a wife of his own—and talks of making up a quarrel he has with her—and is, besides,

going on the Continent, to try and get a practice at some of the great spas frequented from England. He'll do nicely at Wiesbaden—or some of the places where they go for pleasure and amusement, as well as to recover their health, and pretences of that sort. Only he has not money enough for a start—and wants to borrow some of Marrynett—and his mother bothers me terribly to ask for him. But if these strange reports are about, Marrynett might think it queer—and I don't know that I shall!"

"I wouldn't if I were you, dear; especially if there is the least shadow of a foundation for the——remember how unaccountably jealous Marrynett showed himself even on your very first wedding trip, and how he went on at Paris—like a regular madman!" Madame returned; giving very good advice, but not imagining at the time that the matter at all concerned herself.

She found, however, that it did, a little before her departure for town.

Mrs. Marrynett took her sister aside on one occasion, and with a very natural effusion of a

few tears, desired to make her her confidante in a most uncomfortable piece of business. Marrynett really was jealous!—jealous of that stupid handsome young doctor, and kept pestering her about how annoyed he was with the frequency of his visits, now that all occasion for his services was over. "And so I really do want above all things to get him out of the way—out of the country even, if I could—and that dear, kind, faithful Primmer is always begging and praying of me, too. And so I want to lend him three hundred pounds for an outfit abroad, which he has promised to repay almost immediately—but I don't like to ask Marrynett until he is out of the way, and he can't suspect I want it for him—and I have only about a hundred by me; and so I want you, Flippy dearest, to give me credit, on my daughter's account, for the first quarter, and let me keep two of the three hundred her papa has agreed to hand over to you quarterly till you get her married off to some very rich, titled person, and then—"

But Madame de la Mazurka did not in the least relish this proposal, and in return so

positively declared her total inability to undertake such a charge without the proper funds in her hands, that Mrs. Marrynett speedily found the experiment a failure. And this from the sister who had always so despised money, and set up for rank and position only! However, the Countess was at last prevailed upon to allow one hundred of her three hundred to stand over till the commencement of "the season," when money would be required for everything. And with still greater reluctance agreed to pawn secretly in London a portion of her sister's jewels, to make up the remainder of the sum intended as a loan to Dr. Primmer. But she could not forbear a somewhat unkind allusion on the occasion, remarking, "Who can tell what might be pretended, if I were discovered pawning your jewels for you? Everyone in this house has heard about Elizabeth Marrynett stealing your diamond ring!"

Still, Madame de la Mazurka was too much a woman of the world not to perceive some strong necessity for the measure. Moreover, the jewels were clearly worth a great deal more than the sum required to be raised upon them,

as the Countess—having had experience that way—speedily ascertained. But in truth Mrs. Marrynett had a private sum already laid by, amounting to twice the additional one she was obliged to raise in order to make up a thousand pounds. At which price—and at which price only—the doctor, conceiving himself master of the situation, through the fears of Mrs. Marrynett and the insane devotion of his foolish and wicked mother—professed a firm purpose of relieving the former from his presence, and setting up a flourishing practice in foreign parts, where his dear ma'—so he still called her—was to join him, and live happily for ever after.

This good woman herself was by no means cognizant of a portion of her handsome son's purposes; which was put in execution shortly after he had apparently retired from the scene of action with his plunder. Little Clanbrassey's nurse—wet-nurse as she was—suddenly took her departure from the house, unknown to everybody, bag and baggage, after a vehement crying scene, witnessed accidentally by one of the housemaids, over the baby's cradle, but without any information as to her reasons for

the proceeding, or whither she took her departure. Mrs. Primmer was, indeed, obliged completely to invent the explanation she gave, that the nurse and she had quarrelled terribly over the former's neglect and laziness in feeding Master Marrynett out of a sour pap-bottle, and that she had behaved with so much insolence in the course of the discussion that she was forced to the conclusion the woman was the worse for some strong drink. The just reproaches she directed against her for so endangering "dear baby's" health had, no doubt, exasperated "the creature" into so strange a withdrawal, well knowing that such a fault would deprive her of all chance of interference to the contrary on her master's or mistress's part, to whom the precious child's preservation was a matter of so much anxiety and care. But Mrs. Primmer felt in her own heart there was no great likelihood she should be called upon to take charge of her son's household arrangements, during his continental residence, and that a reconciliation she had been secretly working at between him and his lawful wife, as the most respectable means of taking up the

ravelled threads of his destiny, had come to nothing, and the thousand pounds were on a fair way to a similar destination.

But this is a little anticipating events. It was necessary Madame the Countess should arrive first in London, and pawn her sister's jewels, and remit her the proceeds.

That mother of the Marrynetts certainly, like the mother of the Gracchi, considered her children and her jewels identical, and confided both —that is to say, at least, the latter, and the one of the former whose beauty entitled her to be the first offered for negotiation in the great London matrimonial market—with equal unreserve to the care of another. So Adelaide accompanied her aunt as well as the jewels, which Madame de la Mazurka carried much more carefully than her sister Rosanna's physicphial, Mr. Marrynett—who, with his daughter Eugenie, escorted the Countess and her niece, and all their overflow of luggage and parcels, to the train—not having the least reason in the world afforded him for supposing that a selection of his choicest presents to his haughty and luxurious wife, figured among the valuables he

thus kindly assisted in looking after for his sister-in-law and his daughter Adelaide.

Mrs. Marrynett had excused herself from going to the train also, on the plea that she felt so dreadfully weak and nervous, she should be sure to be making a fool of herself before people, if she went. And in reality I must say, to her credit, for the first time she seemed to realize the folly and improvidence of her conduct, in trusting her beautiful child to such heartless, worldly convoying as her sister's, and most severely repented of the whole enterprise, and would have withdrawn from it, had there been any possibility. But there was none, and she remained behind in her splendid house almost as gloomy and inconsolable over her faults and misfortunes, as the unhappy Rosanna herself over hers, in her first seeming recovery at Featherstone Hall.

Nothing very remarkable occurred at the station—though something did—particularly if, as I believe, it was a purely accidental circumstance. Tom Souchong was on the platform with a friend of his—Captain Melton, from the barracks—and a number of dogs, and with

their guns in cases with them, waiting to take the train in an opposite direction to the London one on a shooting excursion.

Tom was looking very ill, swollen in the face, and feverish with recent afflictions and the riotous dissipation in which he had endeavoured to find forgetfulness of his fair false one, and of the unfeeling letter of dismissal he had received. No steadying preparation for recognizing the Marrynett group coming on the railway platform with a couple of footmen in attendance, bearing the luggage from the stylish carriage in which Mr. Marrynett always made his appearance in public.

Tom felt that all was over—the last link to hope broken—and Adelaide Marrynett about to turn her back for ever on him—on Liverpool—to become, with no further delay than was necessary to enable an unmarried duke to catch sight of her loveliness, a duchess!

He turned deadly pale, and quite staggered with the conviction; until Captain Melton, inquiring what the deuce ailed him, and ascertaining, swore by all that was funky and babyish he wouldn't stand a fellow making such a spooney

of himself; and that he should let her see he cared no more for her than she did for him, or he would go up to her himself and ask for her smelling-bottle for him! Then, plucking a geranium from his own coat-breast, the gallant captain stuck it in Tom's, and insisted he should march up with himself, in an unconcerned manner, and wish the young jilt bon voyage to old Nick, if she liked it!

Tom, however, had not the pluck to undertake this fierce enterprise, and so only distantly raised his hat to the Marrynett group, until his mettle was in reality roused by finding he was distinctly and markedly cut by them, one and all. His father's partner even!—but the disagreements between that always ill-yoked pair had of late become so frequent and heavy that they scarcely exhibited the externals of civility to each other, and an immediate decisive rupture seemed imminent to every one.

It so happened, however, that at the moment, Tom's vivacious widow-friend of the Thé Dansant came upon the platform unattended, and, recognizing him, instantly accosted him in the sweetest manner, and with a smile expressive of

all sorts of dulcet things, while she seemed merely to request of him to be so very good as to look out for a place for her in the train.

"I am only going to Birmingham, on business, Mr. Souchong," she said, "for you know I am not a bad woman of business; my late poor husband left everything in my hands to manage, and his was an immense concern. By-the-by, you are fond of horses, are you not? and though omnibus things, I suppose, are seldom worth looking at, I fancy we have almost three thousand in our different stables about the town. But I have been thinking of speculating a little in higher-class animals, and there is plenty of accommodation for training and everything at Westenra. At least I fancy so; but I should so like you to come and see the place, if you would. And there's little Cecilia and Harry are too young to be at school, and will be so delighted to see you, besides, because I told them how kind you were to their mamma at the party at Mr. Marrynett's, or I am sure I do not know how I should have got on at all. And by-the-by, is not that Mr. Marrynett standing there, and his daughter—one of his daughters—not the

one they call so pretty, I should suppose?—and that foreign lady who went bustling about so at the party, though I am sure I could never see what she did, after all. Nothing, I am quite certain, to promote the pleasure and convenience of the company."

Mrs. Larkins was thoroughly well aware that they were the Marrynetts whom she supposed to be there, and knew all about them, Miss Marrynett and all, in their relations to the young fellow she was addressing. But Tom was luckily roused to self-assertion by this notice taken of him by a good-looking, lively, wealthy woman, widow as she might be, mother of five children as she might be. A woman who knew the world, and knew how to manage a large business, but who did not think him a spooney and an incapable, only worthy to be thrown aside with contempt and scorn.

Refreshed by these reflections, and the visible kindness of the widow, and willing to show that he was not quite the imbecile, woe-begone Corydon of a faithless shepherdess he was supposed to be, Tom Souchong rallied his courage and resolution, and blushing scarlet all over his

handsome face, declared nothing would give greater pleasure than to be of service on any occasion to Mrs. Larkins—to inspect her stud on her return, and consider the capabilities of Westenra for the rearing and training of a lighter class of animal of the horse kind. Especially if he might be allowed to bring his friend Captain Melton with him (and he introduced him), who was thoroughly up to everything that way, and could give a thousand times better advice in every way.

Perhaps Mrs. Larkins was not anxious for this proffered addition to the company, but she smiled and bowed a courteous assent to Captain Melton's salute; and, as the latter was a man of much good sense, and knew it was of no use cultivating the chance on his own cccount, as he had the happiness to be already a married man, he speedily made a pretext of going to see after the proper placing of his and Mr. Souchong's dogs in a box in the train, to leave the pair alone.

And now, as it wanted still some little time for the train to start, the widow proposed that they should walk up and down the platform

until it was ready, and talk over the outlines of this new speculation of hers. And Tom Souchong, not being much more of a fool in reality than most young men of five-and-twenty in love with a beauty and cut by her, and thoroughly understanding himself about horses, entered with much animation and satisfaction into the species of discussion invoked concerning them. And he was now listened to in a bewitchingly submissive and looked-up-to manner by an extremely lively, sharp-witted, nattily-figured little widow of, say at most, thirty-seven, but who didn't look thirty in her cleverly-combined ensemble of dress and manner. At the same time that there was no constraint about her—no awkwardness of expecting anything or fearing anything—no humbug of any kind—but as "jolly" to talk to, and be with, as could possibly be desired. Moreover, the chit-chat and interview all taking place under the eyes of the scornful Beauty who had not thought him worthy even of a few words of dismissal, after making him believe for so long a time that he was an object of very great interest to her, who was no longer one of the "Fortune

Marrynett Girls," but almost an adventuress, going on the London market to barter her beauty for wealth—Tom made it as gay and familiar to external observation as he possibly could.

On her part, the expert widow, who considered Tom the handsomest young fellow she had spoken to for many days, and not a bit like her late spouse, who was anything but that, fell into the plan with perfect ease and address. In fact, the pair speedily attracted general notice by their hearty air of enjoyment and cordiality in each other's society, and we may be sure that Miss Adelaide Marrynett was not among the last to notice the circumstance.

Her Parisian aunt was, doubtless, among the first, for she whispered to her charge, at an interval when Mr. Marrynett was away, fussing among their luggage again, " Observe that poor Souchong cadet, for I recognise him, I think! What forced gaiety—what a laugh full of sadness and mockery! My dear child, what idiots men make of themselves when they attempt to disguise a natural emotion by its contrary! It is not always that women succeed in it—but

they seldom make such transparent failures. That young man is pretending to be perfectly happy with the woman beside him—and his heart is breaking to witness your departure—and he feels that this bell of a railway train is for him the knell of an eternal adieu!"

"I wish you would not talk so horridly, aunt, as if we were going to be killed on the railway!" said the young lady addressed, very pettishly, and probably not at all delighted with what she witnessed. "I mean to come back myself, I can assure you, some day, alive and well—and, perhaps, it will all end in nothing, my going to London, and then——"

"And then—what, my dear?"

"How terribly rude of papa not to have bowed even when Mr. Tom Souchong looked at him so hard, and lifted his hat—I couldn't of course, if nobody else did! But how he and that nasty flighty widow with the lots of children seem to be enjoying themselves!" the Beauty murmured on, without seeming to relish the look of things at all.

"There is the first bell, my dear child! We shall soon be in the midst of the splendour and

enjoyments of London, and the triumphs of your beauty will easily console you for the loss of a country admirer of the sort, if even he marries the widow!"

The Beauty looked rather revived on this intimation. "At all events, I am very glad," she said, with a disdainful toss of the head, "that it isn't that stupid Aleck making an exhibition of herself trying after Tom! I am sure it would quite be a disgrace to women altogether, if a girl like that were to force a young man to have her, whether he would or not. It's different, of course, with a widow, though I am sure it is perfectly disgusting to see how this one is going in at Tom Souchong, before everybody."

Miss Adelaide and her aunt were now obliged to get into their carriage, Mr. Marrynett being, in fact, uncomfortably impatient to get them off, that he might run upon 'Change, and hear the news, and resume his toils and intrigues to make his Son and Heir all that he had himself failed to be in rising to honours and dignities. He crammed them in, and shaking hands with both, waited still more wearedly by the door for the

train to start, jabbered at incessantly by Madame de la Mazurka, who remembered all at once a dozen things she had forgotten, and desired to have sent after her. But now it so happened that being so much engaged in their talk, Tom Souchong's widow found all the first-class carriages in the train occupied, when the lady playfully remarked that she really must not delay any longer for the dearest friend she had in the world. All but a single place in the carriage in which the Countess and her niece were already stowed, and settling themselves in the midst of their shawls and smaller parcels, whose name was Legion.

Tom ascertained this fact in a rapid run up and down the line, and brief colloquy with the guard, who was slamming the doors to; and consequently was obliged—with a rather deadly sinking of the heart—to speak directly to Mr. Marrynett—whose hand was on the door-handle—and request leave to let in Mrs. Larkins, for Birmingham.

"This is a London carriage, sir," returned Mr. Marrynett, as cold and distant as if he had never seen the young man before.

"Lady must go on by it to Birmingham—no room elsewhere," said the guard; and removing his hand, Mr. Marrynett called out to his daughter, "B'ye, b'ye, Ada! Ajoo, Madame la Comtesse!" in a Frenchified tone, to attract admiration, and retired disdainfully altogether from the station. To avoid any pretext of friendly intercourse, Tom thought, till looking into the carriage he perceived Ringold Segrave occupied one of the seats—doubtless going to London on business connected with the famous fifty bars of gold.

I do not deny that Tom was rather agitated himself in putting his widow into the railway carriage, having to brush almost close against Miss Adelaide's travelling-dress in arranging Mrs. Larkins' crinoline after her, as she made her way, affecting for the first time to notice Miss Marrynett, to a farther seat. Luckily she was not to sit quite opposite that pouting and insulted-looking young lady. But the circumstance necessitated rather a loud exchange of farewell greetings between the sprightly widow and her attentive cavalier.

"Then I shall see you at Westenra, Mr.

Souchong, immediately I return, and I shall only stay a single night in Birmingham. It is all that is necessary to transact my business; and you really cannot oblige me more than by securing the beautiful horse of Captain Melton's you mention, and I am quite sure nobody can show it off to better advantage, if you would do me the favour to ride it at our next steeple-chases."

"I shall be but too happy, dear Mrs. Larkins, with your colours! You may depend upon my most exact attention to your wishes in all respects," the young man replied, without giving a single glance at his once sole cynosure.

"Now, sir—train's off!"

"Cecilia and Harry are already fond of you, Mr. Souchong, from my report, and will be so proud to let you see their little ponies."

"I am very fond of children, Mrs. Larkins, myself, to begin with; they are almost as natural and kind as—as—as—their mamma! I am so obliged to you and your—your good opinion of me, and my judgment in—in some respects!"

"In all, Mr. Souchong! Good-bye—God

bless you!" with extreme fervour; not motherly, though!

And so the widow and her new admirer, as he most certainly seemed to have become at a stroke, parted, leaving Adelaide Marrynett perfectly surprised to think why it annoyed her so much to know they were so soon to meet again, and on such friendly terms of intimacy.

Involuntarily the proud Beauty's eyes sought Mr. Souchong's with an undefinable expression in them of pique and re-asserted empire. But his back was turned, and he was listening to the eager, laughing congratulations of his friend, Captain Melton, on his conquest of the wealthiest widow in Liverpool, and of tastes and possessions so congenial to his own. If Tom listened a little sadly, he smiled too, and never turned his head to see if the once-adored Beauty relented by a glance.

Perhaps Adelaide herself took advantage of the first tunnel to wipe something that very much resembled tears out of her beautiful eyes, and which were not drawn there by grief at parting from her friends and home. But not the less did the train speed on with its super-

natural rush, and bear her away to the scene of those expected triumphs and happiness, on its shrieking whirlwind, for whose still shadowy attainments she had thrown away the love and devotion of a sincere and manly young heart. Nor did she cease to hate the widow, and censure her bonnet, in any portion of the brief period they spent in each other's company between Birmingham and Liverpool in an express train.

But it is not our present business to follow the Mazurka banners through the storms and sunshine of a London season—the hustling and struggle in the great marriage mart, in which Adelaide Marrynett had consented to be set up for disposal to the highest bidder in the way of rank and wealth. Indeed, the "Marrynett Girls" in general require to grow a little older before the story of their experiences can be profitably resumed; and, therefore, the present historian for awhile bids the attentive reader farewell, and lays down the pen, as it were, on the very threshold of yet greater and more surprising events, precisely as the two cabs in which the Countess and her niece and their conjoint valuables started

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